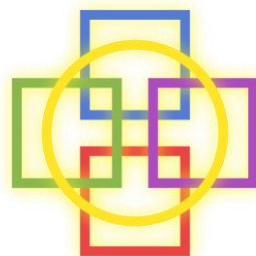




SERMON ARCHIVE 2013

Swedenborgian Community Online



Children, Shepherds, and Dreams

January 6, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Matthew 2:1-12

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" 7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

9When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

From Swedenborg:

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 1975

1975. As regards dreams, it is known that the Lord revealed the arcana of heaven to the prophets, not only by visions, but also by dreams, and that the dreams were as fully representative and significative as the visions, being almost of the same class; and that to others also as well as the prophets things to come were disclosed by dreams; as by the dreams of Joseph, and of those who were in prison with him, and by those of Pharaoh, of Nebuchadnezzar, and others, from which it may be seen that dreams of this kind, equally with visions, flow in from heaven; with this difference, that dreams occur when the corporeal is asleep, and visions when it is not asleep. How prophetic dreams, and such as are found in the Word, flow in, nay, descend from heaven, has been shown me to the life; concerning which I may relate the following particulars, from experience.



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Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Children, Shepherds, and Dreams

by Rev. Wilma

I was jarred awake when my cat pounced on me. I had a vivid recall of the dream I was having. Or, at least the vivid recall lasted for about one half of a second. I had been in a classroom where I was being taught deep insights about the universe. The teaching wasn't exactly in words; it was more like concepts being passed from angelic minds to my own. And I got it. This was it! I got the meaning of life and death. Wow! Of course! It was so very clear. This was so obvious, and I could take it back into my life.

Until my cat jumped on me. Then my new-found knowledge was gone. I could remember the dream and the excitement of finally "getting it." But, now awake, I couldn't begin to grasp what I had just discovered. My waking mind had no way to conceptualize what I had been taught.



I hadn't thought of this dream as experiencing Swedenborg's concept of heaven until reading the astounding book: [Swedenborg: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas](#) by Gary Lachman.

It was refreshing to read a book about Swedenborg from someone with new eyes who could write of this mystic of the past with an integration of science and consciousness of the present.

Lachman points out that Swedenborg's gifts were those of universal consciousness that we all possess. However, the intellect often gets in the way of experiencing them. He says,

Predictably, it is the philosophers, the men of intellect, who deny the reality of the paranormal, while the unlearned often accept it as a fact of life. As Swedenborg knew, shepherds and children are more apt to see angels than are so-called "wise men."

This is an apt day for appreciating this observation. January 6th is Epiphany in the Christian calendar. It is also called Three Kings' Day [el Dia de los Tres Reyes,].

This is the day that the shepherds finally arrived in Bethlehem to honor baby Jesus. The shepherds were simple men of the country side, who were open to recognizing the miracle that took place in their midst.

The term epiphany means "to show" or "to make known" or even "to reveal. Much was revealed to the shepherds from the angels.

I also felt that things are sometimes revealed to me in dreams that I can't remember

when awake.

Swedenborg commented on that phenomena in his *Spiritual Diary*:

Spirits induce dreams, and when the man sleeps they likewise dream.

... Things seen and represented in a dream were perceived in the dream but were inexpressible in wakefulness. What and whence they are.

He also wrote:

Spiritual Experiences (Odhner) n. 779

779. Once while a spirit was sleeping, I was awake and paying little attention to his sleep. Then there was another spirit who was sleeping and displayed what that spirit was feeling. At the same time there were also angels, who were inspiring this dream, who are always awake. Therefore, dreams like this one come from heaven, and there are angels who cause them, from the Lord, and there are other spirits who then believe they are enacting [the dream]. I even heard how this spirit was working, and what was being said. 1748, 15 February.

We are starting a new month, and our theme is "heaven" – part of our year on "The Spiritual World." Heaven can be experienced from angels, in dreams, and just by being open – like children and shepherds.

Lachman wrote this in his book:

But what struck me most forcefully was Swedenborg's admission that, after returning to earth from heaven, he was unable to remember what the angels had told him. Clearly this was because of the terrific amount of meaning the angels can infuse into their utterances. ... What strikes me as important here is that the difficulty Swedenborg had in retaining the significance of his angelic conversations did not necessarily lie in what those conversations were about, but in the slowness of our intellects and, perhaps more important, the inefficiency of our language, something that Swedenborg clearly recognized and experienced. If angels can say more in a minute than we can in a half hour, and if they can convey more in a few words than we can in whole books, this must be because they have a language capable of doing this.

Gary Lachman (born December 24, 1955) is an American writer and musician.

Lachman is one of the founders, and bassist for the Alternative rock/New Wave band, Blondie.

His book on Swedenborg was published by the Swedenborg Foundation of England in 2009. It was picked up by Tarcher/Penguin and re-published in the spring of 2012. There were a number of reviews of it, including one in the [Washington Post](#). Lachman wrote about his book in a belief-section article in [Huffington Post](#).

In 2003 he wrote *A Secret History of Consciousness* with Colin Wilson and in 2010 a book on Jung was published. In 2007 he wrote a book on Rudolf Steiner. In the fall of 2012 he had a book on Madame Blavatsky published. His background and interests



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make him particular suitable to give us a fresh perspective on Swedenborg.

I find his book to give me a deeper understanding of Swedenborg's teachings that heaven and hell are real places after death AND are being created every day in our lives on the earth.

During the next few weeks, we'll continue to explore Swedenborg's visits to heaven, using Lachman's book and other resources.

How do you experience heaven in your life and dreams?

PRAYER BY REV. JUDITH

Dear God, who knows all and inspires the Angels, help us to communicate with you and our Guardian Angels being open to love and thanksgiving. Keep us focused on the the Divine Nature of our lives. Help us to heal the spiritual bumps, bruises and cuts of our earthly existence with the true spirit of harmony and light. Help us in our training as spiritual beings to learn the mystery of Divine Love. Keep us close to you and open a channel to our minds and hearts for the Angels to share with us. Let us be surround with Divine Light. Thank you, Lord, thank you. AMEN."



Round Trip Ticket to Heaven

January 13, 2013

READINGS

Scripture
John 14:2

King James Version (KJV)

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

From Swedenborg:

Divine Love and Wisdom (Dole) n. 113113. Angels are in the Lord and the Lord is in them; and since angels are vessels, the Lord alone is heaven. Heaven is called God's dwelling and God's throne, so people think that God lives there like a monarch in a realm. However, God--that is, the Lord--is in the sun above the heavens and is in the heavens by means of his presence in warmth and light, as I have explained in the last two sections. Further, even though the Lord is present in heaven in this apparently distant way, he is still also intrinsically present there, so to speak, since as I have just explained in 103-112 the distance between the sun and heaven is not a distance but a virtual distance. Given the fact that this distance is only apparent, then, it follows that the Lord himself is in heaven. He is in the love and wisdom of heaven's angels; and since he is in the love and wisdom of all the angels and the angels make up heaven, he is in all of heaven.

ROUND-TRIP TICKET TO HEAVEN



by Rev. Wilma



Swedenborgian
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Most of us go to heaven on a “one-way ticket.” When we go; we don’t come back. It is rare for someone to be able to visit heaven, and then return to talk about it. For Swedenborg, round trips to heaven were part of daily life.

Gary Lachman’s book on Swedenborg [*Swedenborg: An Introduction to his Life and Ideas*] was published by the Swedenborg Foundation of England in 2009. It was picked up by Tarcher/Penguin and re-published in the spring of 2012.

He writes:

Today, if people ask me who Swedenborg was and I answer that he wrote books about his visits to heaven and hell, the usual response is a raised eyebrow, a nod and a facial expression suggesting that, in that case, he must have been crazy. In Swedenborg’s day, however, the idea that one could journey to heaven and hell met with a different response. For most people, heaven and hell were real places, and although unusual, the idea that someone could travel there was not necessarily impossible.

He sees Swedenborg’s heavenly travels as completely real:

Swedenborg’s visits to heaven and hell were, I think, more than allegories of human weaknesses and divine grace. They were, I think, excursions into other states of consciousness, states that others also entered.

He had on-going conversations with famous people in the spirit world:

Swedenborg often remarked, almost offhandedly, about his conversations with the famous dead. It was not unusual for him to comment casually, “As St. Paul said to me just the other day...” This sort of thing is, of course, not uncommon among spiritualists or “channellers,” but it seems clear that Swedenborg did not do it to impress or to glean some importance from hobnobbing with ghostly celebrities. It was just a fact of his life.

Swedenborg’s visits to heaven are different from what many other accounts have been: *A reader first coming to Swedenborg’s account of heaven may find it difficult to see this: what first strikes us is the description of heavenly houses, gardens, parks and erotic relationships.*

However, none of these things are the same as they are on the earth:

Yet the familiar setting afforded by Swedenborg’s heaven is deceptive. There, things are not really the same as here. For one thing, time and space do not exist in heaven as they do on earth. Time there is not measured in days, weeks or years, but in changes in state.

Lackman points out that Swedenborg describes three layers of heaven:

There are in fact three heavens: the celestial, the spiritual and the natural, each successively at a further distance from what Swedenborg calls “the Lord’s Divine.” Each participates to a greater or lesser degree in divine truth and love. Most ineffable is the celestial heaven, which participates directly in the will or intention of the Divine. The spiritual heaven participates in this less fully, but has an equal share of the divine understanding. The natural heaven, the lowest, has a small share in the divine discernment, and, by heavenly standards, very little of the divine intention. This



arrangement makes clear that even in heaven, Swedenborg's notion of "degrees" holds sway.

Swedenborg lived in a different time, and had a life immersed in spirituality.

Another person with a round-trip ticket to heaven is a modern man; a neurosurgeon named Eben Alexander. He wrote about his experiences in a book, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*.

Alexander was born in 1953 and grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His father was a neurosurgeon, and Eben followed in his footsteps. He taught at Harvard, got married and had two sons. But on November 10, 2008, at age 54, Dr. Alexander contracted a rare form of meningitis and fell into a deep coma. His experiences in coma constitute the basis of his book, *Proof of Heaven*.

Here is a piece of what he wrote:

I ...found myself in a completely new world. The strangest, most beautiful world I'd ever seen. Brilliant, vibrant, ecstatic, stunning. . . I could heap on one adjective after another to describe what this world looked and felt like, but they'd all fall short. I felt like I was being born. Not reborn, or born again. Just . . . born.

Here is a part of an interview he had with Oprah:

Oprah: If I asked you before this experience, "Do you believe in God?" what would've been your answer?

Dr. Alexander: I would've said no. There was no way to explain it based on my neuroscientific career.

Oprah: You say -- I love this -- on page 8 [of Proof of Heaven] that "All of consciousness is brain based. If you don't have a working brain, you can't be conscious." So, let's talk about what that experience was like. Can you take us on that [near-death] journey?

Dr. Alexander: Initially I was in this sort of vague, foggy, murky underground. It was kind of a hideous place. ...

I was just awareness. Just a piece of awareness.

Oprah: This is fantastic, I love this!

Dr. Alexander: Then I was rescued by this spinning white light. And as it got closer, it expanded.

Oprah: This sounds as crazy as it can be, but: It opened you up to another dimension?

Dr. Alexander: It did. Totally different.

Oprah: So now you're going into another dimension where you met a guide -- a woman

who led you on a journey on the wings of a giant butterfly, into another world of inexplicable beauty. Did you recognize her?

Dr. Alexander: No. She was very beautiful. And she was looking at me with the most loving smile.

Oprah: What is the message you received? Tell us that.

Dr. Alexander: "You are loved, deeply cherished, forever. There is nothing you have to fear. You will always be loved, and there's nothing that you can do wrong."

Oprah: So what we all want to know is, did you see God?

Dr. Alexander: Yes.

Oprah: What's he look like? Is it a he?

Dr. Alexander: Well, to answer your question briefly, no, God has no gender. In fact, I did not use the word "God" in my writing for months, because the power and the awe of the all-loving, all-powerful deity is beyond any words at all.

...

Oprah: I have always said that! I say they come in trailing the breath of the angels. Now I ask you today: Do you believe in God?

Dr. Alexander: Absolutely have no doubt whatsoever... and know the eternity of our souls. It's the only thing that makes sense. I didn't have a body— not one that I was aware of anyway. I was simply . . . there, in this place of pulsing, pounding darkness.

If you were given a round-trip ticket to heaven, would you use it? What would you do there? What would you want to see, who would you want to talk to? How do you think it would change your life when you returned?

Is there anything in these accounts of heavenly visits that changes your life today?



"Oh, God, this has been a trying and challenging week. Give us inspiration, an intuitive thought, or a decision about our work for this week. What is your will for us? May we be blessings to our families and fellows. Give us peace, health and ease while we choose. Fill us with silence and knowing your wishes for us. With grateful hearts we pray.
AMEN. "

With love, Rev. Judith

Becoming a Beloved Community

January 20, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Revelation 21

New International Version (NIV)

A New Heaven and a New Earth

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

Matthew 5:43-45 (New Revised Standard Version)(v. 43) *” You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ (v. 44) But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (v. 45) so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”*

From Swedenborg:
Apocalypse Revealed, 876

”And I John saw the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven” signifies the New Church to be established by the Lord at the end of the former church, which will be consociated with the New Heaven in Divine truths as to doctrine and as to life (n. 879-880)

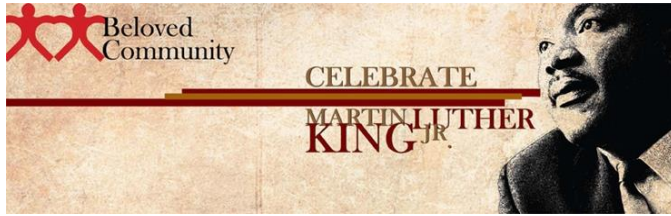
From Martin Luther King, Jr:

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.

Becoming a Beloved Community



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life



by Rev. Wilma

What an amazing week-end this is! The National Day of Service, in honor of King, is being observed with thousands of people volunteering their time. Sunday is recognized in some traditions as “Beloved Community Sunday” or “Human Relations Sunday.” Today [and tomorrow] is the 2nd inauguration of the first African-American President in the U.S. On Monday we celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

In honor of this week-end, let’s focus on King’s extraordinary concept of “beloved community.” It may seem familiar to readers of Swedenborg, for our Emmanuel's New Jerusalem is much the same concept. However, King describes it in passionate ways that articulate the issues of our own time.



We've been exploring Swedenborg's visits to heaven and his approach to "heaven on earth." Let's look at how Martin Luther King Jr. describes what "heaven on earth" might be like.

In 1956, King spoke at the Montgomery bus boycott. He had only been out of seminary for two years. Yet he put forth the astounding idea that the end goal of the boycott was *reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.*

What did he mean by "beloved community?"

We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

After the March to Montgomery in the spring of 1966, several thousand marchers were stuck at the airport due to late planes:

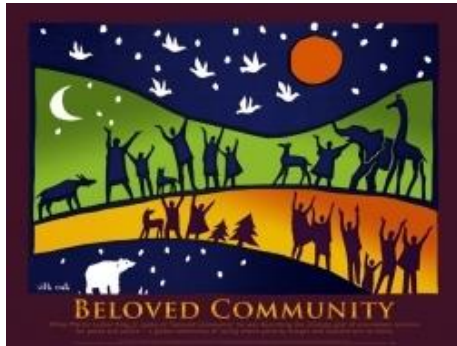
As I stood with them and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shopworkers brimming with vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood [Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (Harper & Row, 1967)' p. 9]

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
In a real sense, all life is interrelated.*



Let us be dissatisfied until rat-infested, vermin-filled slums will be a thing of a dark past and every family will have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and the idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized. . . . Let us be dissatisfied until our brothers of the Third World of Asia, Africa and Latin America will no longer be the victims of imperialist exploitation, but will be lifted from the long night of poverty, illiteracy and disease. ["Honoring Dr. Du Bois," in Freedomways, VIII, s (Spring 1968), pp. 110-111].

In a 1957 speech, Birth of a New Nation, Dr. King said, *The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence is emptiness and bitterness.*"



In his 1959 Sermon on Gandhi, *The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle's over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor.*” In the same sermon, he contrasted violent versus nonviolent resistance to oppression. *“The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.*

In his 1963 sermon, Loving Your Enemies, *With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.*



I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community. But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposites into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.

From “The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma,” 1957



The logic of King's dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation. To be sure, King's concept of love was surely not the platitudinous "all you need is love"; it was rather the passion to make human life and social existence a parable of God's love.

Marsh, Charles (2008-07-31). *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (p. 2). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

What will you do this week to help us become a "beloved community"? Choose any volunteer activity that serves others in love. It doesn't need to be an entire day. If you can spend one hour in loving service, you will help transform our violent earth into a caring "beloved community."

Let us pray.



Inspiration & Prayer for 1/20/13:

Your inspiration for today is to pray for others and yourself. To practice communion with the Lord. I ask that you say prayers for our Professor Inese Radzins, her husband, David, and their two boys. David has brain and lung cancer which is incurable by earthly means.

Pray for their comfort, love etc.....you know.

" Lord, creator of all, we ask for your protection, care, comfort and healing of David Kangas if it be your will. We ask for your veil of light to surround the family as they live with David's illness. We know that you will give all of them peace, acceptance and comfort whatever your will is. I ask for your deepest heart felt wish for the entire Swedenborgian Family, and blessings for all. May the Angels surround us at this time of crisis. Praise to you Lord, with deep thankfulness. Thy will be done. Let thy light shine fully on us all.

AMEN."

Love, and gratitude for all,
rev judith



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Love, Spirit, Life

A Vision Continues

January 27, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Psalm 77

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.

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



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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

A Vision Continues



by Rev. Wilma

In 1988, I was a student at the Swedenborg School of Religion. I was thrilled to receive a scholarship to the Swedenborg Foundation's celebration of the 300th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth!

It was quite a birthday bash! It honored the oneness of spirituality and science. There were famous speakers like Dr. Raymond Moody and Dr. Stephen Larsen, representing both science and spirit.

That same year, the Swedenborg Foundation released *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision*. It is a fascinating volume about Swedenborg's life and times and influence.

Tuesday will be the 325th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth.

Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan gave a talk to honor Swedenborg's birthday in 2009 at Byrn Athyn College. This is part of what she said:

300 years ago, on January 28th, Emanuel Swedberg sat in the library of the University in Uppsala, Sweden. ... Emanuel tried to concentrate. He was a student of philosophy in his final year at the university, a discipline, which at that time included mathematics, his particular passion. He had matriculated ten years ago, as a boy of eleven. First he had attended classes in preparation for gymnasium or high school, later he took courses as a gymnasium student; and now he was a man, concluding his university career by writing his thesis or disputation. A successful defense of it would mark his graduation. His thesis was on his mind, but so were

other things, tomorrow God willing, he would celebrate his twenty-first birthday. He could hardly wait! He wondered if his fellow members of the Västmanland Dala Student Nation would do something to honor him, a dinner perhaps, or going out on the town. He certainly hoped so!

We know that the young man Emanuel successfully defended his thesis, and went on to achieve a brilliant and unsurpassed career.

Swedenborg lived at a time when religion and science were at odds. He was a lone voice crying out that they belonged together.

The late Donella Meadows, a pioneer in looking at system's theory, used to tell 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.

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 about reality as a dance:

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]

Swedenborg wrote about dance as an ancient form of prayer from The Word:

The meaning of 'dance' as that which has regard to 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.*

Let's stop to remember the incredible life of Emanuel Swedenborg and all that he has given to us. Let's dance in memory of Swedenborg, who could honor the presence of the Divine in dance, and would want science and spirituality to dance together for all of eternity!

Let us pray.



Precious Lord, who governs all things, teach us to be grateful for all we have in our lives both good and bad for they teach us and polish us according to your will. Give us the understanding that having gratitude is a precious practice, and expands our lives and hearts. Thank you, Lord for the wisdom shared by Swedenborg, and the other teachers in our lives. We are eternally grateful for all you bring us. AMEN.

Love, Rev. Judith

On Going to Hell

February 3, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Mt. 5

29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Swedenborg

there is in the universal heaven not one who was created an angel from the first, nor any devil in hell who was created an angel of light, and cast down, but that all both in heaven and in hell are from the human race; in heaven those who had lived in the world in heavenly love and faith, and in hell those who had lived in infernal love and faith... Last Judgement #14

ON 'GOING TO HELL'



by Rev. Wilma

How often have you heard a completely chaotic situation described as "gone to hell?" A very rude insult in our culture is "go to hell!" These common uses of the term hell demonstrate the deep fear we have about this horrible region.

Hell has been depicted in various ways throughout history in art and literature. Most recently, we've discussed how it was portrayed in the movie, "What Dreams May Come."

Our topic for the year is "The Spiritual World." Last month we looked at "heaven." So, of course, this month we must journey to hell to complete the picture!

Because this is the first Sunday of the month, we'll focus on what Swedenborg wrote about "hell," and then we'll look at various ways we create and experience hell on earth.

On the first Thursday of the month, we'll read and discuss some of the passages from "Heaven and Hell." On the 2nd Thursday, we'll have a little mini-course with more depth on this topic from a Swedenborgian perspective.

So – today – we'll look at how Swedenborg saw this topic. This is an area where Swedenborg differentiates himself from much of Christian teachings. A common belief is that God created a separate group of beings called "angels." These angels had not been to the earth as human; they were a different entity altogether. One of the created angels went bad, and was thrown into hell by God. Satan has since ruled over the hells and tried to ruin the lives of many humans through temptations.

Swedenborg was clear that God ruled heaven AND hell. The Lord made certain that equilibrium was maintained, so that the hells could never become too powerful.

536. Above, in treating of heaven it has been everywhere shown (especially in n. 2–6) that the God of heaven is the Lord, thus that the whole government of the heavens is the Lord's government. And as the relation of heaven to hell and of hell to heaven is like the relation between two opposites which mutually act contrary to each other, and from the action and reaction of which an equilibrium results, which gives permanence to all things of their action and reaction, so in order that all things and each thing may be kept in equilibrium it is necessary that he who rules the one should rule the other; for unless the same Lord restrained the uprisings from the hells and checked insanities there, the equilibrium would perish and everything with it.

In fact, much of reason the Lord sent Jesus to earth was to help restore a balance on earth, as the hells had become too powerful.

Swedenborg completely rejects the concept of "Satan." First of all, angels are ALL human beings who passed out of body into heaven. They were never a separate class of being. Secondly, there is no "Satan" or "devil." There are only human beings who, out of free will, have chosen to do evil in life.

As our Swedenborgian reading for today says:
there is in the universal heaven not one who was created an angel from the first, nor any devil in hell who was created an angel of light, and cast down, but that all both in heaven and in hell are from the human race; in heaven those who had lived in the world in heavenly love and faith, and in hell those who had lived in infernal love and faith... Last Judgment #14



After death, they continue to prefer evil. In fact, “hell” is a very appealing place to them, whereas heaven is boring and filled with blinding light.

I think of a kind of hell-on-earth as the life of a person with a serious addiction. Think of a late-stage alcoholic who goes from bar to bar getting drunk. He has little left in his life except being drunk, and he spends all of his time trying to get more alcohol. Imagine such a person who is now a homeless street person whose obsession is his next drink. Imagine now offering him two choices: A lovely, clean shelter with all the healthy foods he wants and full of loving people – but no alcohol. The other choice is a smoke-filled bar of drunken people – where he can have all he wants to drink. If we give him these choices, which will be his “heaven” and which his “hell”? Of course, he would feel he had gone to heaven to be in a bar where he can have all he wants to drink! The other choice would feel like a hell to him.

Swedenborg talks about our life after death as being given choices. One place is filled with people committed to loving actions and growth. The other is people who love power and domination and war. We freely choose where we are most comfortable. Here is one description he has of hell from "Heaven and Hell":

Destruction of Babylon.

560. Picture to yourself a society of such persons, all of whom love themselves alone and love others only so far as they make one with themselves, and you will see that their love is precisely like the love of thieves for each other, who embrace and call one another friends so long as they are acting together; but when they cease to act together and discard their subordination to one another, they rise up against and murder one another. When the interiors or the minds of such are explored they will be seen to be full of bitter hatred one against another, and at heart will laugh at all justice and honesty, and likewise at the Divine, which they reject as of no account. This is still more evident in the societies of such in the hells treated of below.

Swedenborg was considered a heretic in Christian circles for believing that we freely choose heaven or hell for ourselves. Traditionally, God judged each soul after death and determined what his/her eternal fate would be. That has left many good souls in fear throughout their lives of doing something to displease the “judge” and be sent to hell.

Many of us feel a sense of reassurance in knowing that we ourselves are our only judge.

One question often raised about Swedenborg’s teachings on hell is whether it has to be a permanent state. If you choose “hell” after death, can you ever reverse that decision and move up to heaven? Some of Swedenborg’s statements suggest that hell is

forever, but others give us another perspective.

I have greatly valued what I learned from Rev. Dr. Bob Kirven, now in the heavens. He was my advisor when I was a seminary student. I loved both his wisdom about Swedenborg's writings and his sense of humor. Here is what he wrote on this topic:

I have found a very helpful discussion of this topic in Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven's book, *A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology* [J. Appleseed & Co., 2003 p. 130 – 131]

There is one more point that is not central to me, but it is for many. There is a complexity in what Swedenborg says about it that needs to be noted. The issue usually is called 'the eternity of the hells,' but generally refers to the eternity of one's abode there. In Heaven and Hell #480 [and Secrets of Heaven #19749, TC #399 and several other passages], Swedenborg seems to say pretty plainly that the hells are eternal and everyone who joins them stays there eternally.

However, there are some other statements, which caused a lot of controversy around the turn of the century.

Two of them are from Spiritual Experiences:

I desire to state this fact, for I know it to be true, for I have perceived it, that many ... [in hell] have been raised from hell and torments into heaven where they now live ... [Spiritual Experiences #228]

[In a large vat in hell] there are none of those there who perished in the time of the Flood, but they have been brought out ... and there are those who have been created anew. SE 286

Also, SE 1497, read in light of SE 1928, indicates that certain spirits remain in a dungeon in hell "for centuries, until their former life is altered ... Thus their former life dies, although it still remains." After this, they were enabled by a "superadded gift" to live among angels. Whether you read this as complementary or contradictory to Heaven and Hell 480, is a subjective judgment, not an objective one.

It is interesting that Swedenborg didn't start to write Secrets of Heaven until he had reached 3427 or so of Spiritual Experiences. There was a controversy, early on, over whether Swedenborg originally didn't believe in the eternity of the hells and changed his mind later. When that controversy was at its height, Convention's Council of Ministers held an open meeting to discuss the issue. The meeting was packed but failed to reach a conclusion, so a committee of ministers was appointed to do further research in the matter. The committee never reported back and never was discharged, and all its members have died. I do not know whether or not they are continuing their research....

Now that Bob has joined his deceased colleagues in the heavens, we can assume that the research is continuing and we will learn its results when we join them!

What does it mean for you that we can freely choose “heaven” or “hell” after death? What does it mean for you that we make these choices for ourselves each day on earth?



" Dear Lord of our Hearts, help us today to rid us of those fears that keep us in bondage. Help us to be open to your prompting, and regenerating Grace. Keep us safe from the hells of negative thinking and actions. In our daily service to you help us to be positive, and affirming. Keep us from judgment of others and empower all toward good useful talents and lives. We give thanks everyday for all we have been given, for what we are able to give to others, and receive from others. Thank you. AMEN."

With love, Rev. Judith

A Living Hell

February 10, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

New International Version (NIV)

Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- 1 You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

- 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

- 13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,



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I know that full well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts,[a] God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

19 If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
20 They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
22 I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
23 Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24 See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Footnotes:

Psalm 139:17 Or How amazing are your thoughts concerning me

Swedenborg

LOVE is our life ... Even though the word “love” is so commonly on our tongues, still hardly anyone knows what love is. When we stop to think about it, we find that we cannot form any image of it in our thoughts, so we say either that it is not really anything or that it is simply something that flows into us from our sight, hearing, touch, and conversation and therefore influences us. We are wholly unaware that it is our very life—not just the general life of our whole body and of all our thoughts, but the life of their every least detail.

Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE, #1

A Living Hell



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by Rev. Wilma

Have you ever had a time in your life when you felt that you were going through a “living hell”?

Anton Boisen [1876 - 1965] did. He was a minister who had several psychotic episodes in his life. He felt that they were an experience of “hell,” yet they gave him the background to later establish Clinical Pastoral Education for the training of ministers. He has an important place in history; a place that he felt he got to, in part, because of his time in “hell.”

He wrote:

... sanity in itself is not an end in life. The end of life is to solve important problems and to contribute in some way to human welfare, and if there is even a chance that such an end could best be accomplished going through Hell for awhile, no man worthy of the name would hesitate for an instant.

He felt that many great people in history – including Swedenborg – had gone through a difficult and trying time that freed them for great work for humanity. They also included: St. Teresa of Avila and George Fox [the founder of the Quakers]

Rev. Robert Leas researched Boisen and wrote his biography. Leas says about these historical figures:

... these writers ... all depict passing through a period of acute conflict, often likened to a state of spiritual darkness, and at a “tipping point” discovering an integrated faith and selfhood, a new light on life and the holy.

Boisen called his time of conflict as being in “hell,” others might think of it as a “dark night of the soul.”

St. John of the Cross saw a “dark night” as an important preparation for a deeper spiritual life. The late Dr. Jerry May wrote that a dark night of the soul often frees us from the past, so that we can come to experience God more fully. May writes: “An ... *unsettling experience is the loss of the sense of God’s presence, which can often feel like being abandoned by God. Many people are used to a consistent and long-lasting feeling of the presence of God in their lives. Then, sometimes, it disappears.*”

That, to May, is the dark night of the soul. He writes:

“...it is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction, the light shining most brightly on them that God darkens all this light and closes the door and spring of the sweet spiritual water they were tasting.”

John of the Cross says that the dark night usually comes to someone who has worked spiritual disciplines for a long time, and has a deep, satisfying experience with spiritual tools. But then, it seems that these same disciplines no longer bring peace and satisfaction: they are empty. In fact, the person has no desire to continue to do them.

These are St. John's first 2 signs of the dark night: the regular spiritual practices no longer bring comfort, and one has no desire to do them anymore.

The third sign is that one just wants to “hang out” with God without any particular format or plan.

It can be a frightening time, since all that one has identified as “my spirituality” no longer has meaning. The prayers, the meditative techniques, the readings, the worship services, the friends – may no longer hold comfort or be of any interest. There can be an intense questioning of *who am I* ... esp. in relationship to God.

In time, through “hanging out” with God, one develops a contemplative spirituality. This, Jerry May said, has 2 major components:

1. Openness to everything. Instead of having a focus on just one thing – as in many meditative techniques – one's awareness encompasses everything at once.
2. Living in the moment – one is able to be fully present to the Divine in the moment.

The dark night of the soul is feared by many. One cannot learn to ride a bike until the training wheels are removed. It can be a frightening experience; yet it is the gateway to gliding along all alone on a two-wheeler. In the same way, we cannot move deeper into union with the Divine until our old ways of relating to God are gone.

Swedenborg talks about the period of “reformation” when we live by rote and rules; thinking we do it all ourselves. Then we come to realize how much Divine Providence is part of our being. Eventually we continue to live within the same rules of life, but now we do it from love rather than from rules. In the same way, our spiritual life sometimes requires rules for the living of life. At other times, we need to be able to walk away from old rules so that God can show us new ways of relating.

A dark night of the soul doesn't necessarily involve bad things happening in one's life, but sometimes it unfolds that way. In such periods, we sometimes think that we are abandoned by God, and that God has sent us to an earthly hell.

But Swedenborg says that God never sends anyone to hell, and in fact, God is in charge of hell as well as of the heavens. What we experience as “hell” can simply be

God trying to reach us and speak to us on a deeper level; in a way that we can't yet hear the Divine.

St. John of the Cross says that the way through the spiritual darkness is to listen carefully for God's guidance; not so much in our old ways, but finding new ways of being able to feel God's presence.

How have you found God in periods of darkness?

Let us pray.



God, our beloved Creator, in times of trouble and travail, help us to know that whatever is happening in our lives you will always be with us and will never abandon us. Even going through the "Dark Night of the Soul" you are always with us, Your Love and Peace are with us in our hearts. Bless us with the comfort and closeness we so deeply need from You. Let us be a blessing to all people this week as we celebrate St.Valentine's Day! And let us share your love with all whom we meet. Thank you, Lord, thank you. AMEN."
Love, Rev. Judith

Near Death Experiences - from Hell

February 17, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Psalms 121 (New International Version)

A song of ascents.

- 1 *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?*
- 2 *My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*
- 3 *He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;*
- 4 *indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*
- 5 *The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;*
- 6 *the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.* 7 *The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;*
- 8 *the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.*

Swedenborg

SOME people cherish the notion that God turns his face away from people, spurns them, and casts them into hell, and is angry against them because of their evil. Some people even go so far as to think that God punishes people and does them harm. They support this notion from the literal meaning of the Word where things like this are said, not realizing that the spiritual meaning of the Word, which makes sense of the letter, is wholly different. So the real doctrine of the church, which is from the spiritual meaning of the Word, teaches something else. It teaches that the Lord never turns his face away from anyone or spurns anyone, never casts anyone into hell or is angry. Anyone whose mind is enlightened perceives this while reading the Word simply from the fact that the Lord is goodness itself, love itself, and mercy itself. Good itself cannot do harm to anyone. Love itself and mercy itself cannot spurn anyone, because this is contrary to mercy and love and is therefore contrary to the divine nature itself. So people who are thinking with an enlightened mind when they read the Word perceive clearly that God never turns away from us, and that because he does not turn away from us, he behaves toward us out of goodness and love and mercy. That is, he wills well toward us, loves us, and has compassion on us. Enlightened minds also see from this that the literal meaning of the Word where things like this are said has a spiritual meaning concealed within it, a meaning needed to explain expressions that in the letter are adapted to human comprehension, things said in accord with our primary and general



conceptions.
Heaven & Hell, NCE, #545

Near-Death Experiences: From Hell



by Rev. Wilma

It was the early 1960's and a hot summer night in New York State. Nancy Evans Bush, a 28-year-old woman with deep Christian beliefs, was in labor with her second child. She was in pre-mature labor and was anesthetized. However, she was, in fact awake and was flying over the roof of the hospital. She saw her town becoming smaller and then the planet itself becoming smaller. She felt completely alone:



There was nothing but that strange, dark twilight, and the awareness of being there, and emptiness. There was a sense of form to me, I recall, or at least of presence, but no body. It was as if I were made of veiling—just insubstantial. But I was thinking. Did I have a mind, or was I being a mind? An unanswerable question.

A group of circles appeared ahead and slightly to my left, perhaps a half-dozen of them, moving toward me. Half black and half white, they clicked as they flew, snapping white-to-black, black-to-white, sending an authoritative message without words. Somehow its meaning was clear: "This is all there is. This is all there ever was. This is it. Anything else you remember is a joke. You are not real. You never were real. You never existed. Your life never existed. The world never existed. It was a game you were allowed to invent. There was never anything, or anyone. That's the joke—that it was all a joke."

The thin darkness stretched off into nothingness, a thin not-quite-mist of dusk, and the circles kept clicking. And then I was entirely alone. The circles had moved out of sight, and there was nothing left—the world unreal and gone, and with it my first baby and this baby who would never be born, and all other babies I thought that no one could bear so much grief, but there seemed no end to it and no way out. Everyone, everything, gone, even God, and I was alone forever in the swimming twilight dark. And then I was groggily coming to in a hospital bed.



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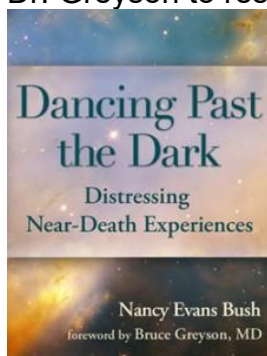
She was enormously relieved to be alive in her hospital bed with a new baby. But her faith was shattered.

Why had this happened to her? It was such a horrible experience, that she dared not tell anyone about it.

Twenty years passed. Her baby grew up. Nancy looked for a part-time job, and applied to do temporary office work for a small start-up non-profit at the University of Connecticut. The non-profit was the [International Association of Near Death Experiences](#). Nancy learned about “near-death experiences,” and felt that that was what she had had. However, almost all near-death experiences were glorious and glowing. Why not hers? Over time, she came to realize that there was a secret in the near-death community – some people had horrible, hellish near-death experiences.

Nancy became increasingly more involved in IANDES, as Executive Director and as President. She was on-the-scene when Moody’s book *Life After Life* was published in 1975, heralding the era of the “near-death experience.” Social psychologist Kenneth Ring and psychiatrist Bruce Greyson became well-known spokespersons for this new movement.

Slowly, Nancy came to realize that she was not alone in having had a “hellish” NDE. Others, like her, were afraid to talk about their experiences. Who wants to say that they experienced God sending them to hell? However, Nancy began to work with Dr. Greyson to research the NDE’s “from hell.”



Eventually, she wrote a book about these NDE’s, and their possible meaning: *Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near Death Experiences*.

In this book, she identifies three main types of unpleasant NDE’s:

Ones that were quite similar to the pleasant NDE’s, except that the person was frightened.

A void – in which there was nothing. Nancy’s was like that.

Hellish – experiencing a horrible place of punishment. In their study, Greyson and Bush could find no differences between those who had a positive NDE and those who had a negative one. Both groups had about the same number of religious people, and people whose lives were meaningful and full. There was no indication that those who experienced hell were evil people who deserved punishment. However, they found that nearly one in five NDE’s has negative components.

What could that mean?

Bush takes us through history, literature, theology, and psychology to provide a range of answers.

Most NDE's actually do not occur at a time when the person is clinically dead. Many of them are perhaps dream-like experiences that we could understand in a Jungian sense of archetypes from the unconscious.

Many spiritual teachers consider negative experiences part of the path of growth: Shinzen Young (2005), an American Buddhist teacher of mindfulness meditation, has noted that terrifying images—insectoid, grotesquely otherworldly, demonic—may appear in advanced meditation. He teaches that they are “best interpreted as part of a natural process of release from the deep archetypal levels of the mind. Such upwelling visionary material is a natural function of human consciousness and should not be cause for the slightest concern”

Many NDE's are mystical experiences, and encountering “the void” is a common mystical reality. Bush writes:

Any NDE is a mystical experience, but with few exceptions, Western people are not educated mystics. The fear in experiences of the Void rises out of profound, fathomless detachment from self and other, for which most of us are totally unprepared. In addressing the fear produced by the Void, Gerald May quoted the fourteenth century spiritual guide, Theologica Germanica: “Nothing burns in hell but self-will.” May commented (1982, 103) that “Notions of giving up and self-surrender rub harshly against the grain of modern society, but the contemplatives go even further. They proclaim, with a conviction that can be absolutely frightening, that self-image must truly die... A dying image of self, or a dying belief in such an image, must be accompanied by a dying of one's images of the world as well. It is not an easy business.” By contrast, the Montreal Zen Center director can say with utter serenity, “We can come to see that we are not a thing, a body, a soul, a person, or even a spirit. Fundamentally we are beyond all forms and ideas.”

Some of the negative NDE's were like the shaman's journey: Throughout the world, in shamanic initiation experiences, it is common for initiates to sense being attacked or devoured by hostile entities and then ‘reassembled’ into a ‘new being.’ The pattern of death, resurrection, and rebirth is among the oldest and most widespread in human history. However, if our study is representative, attack may be uncommon in Western near-death experiences.

This approach is similar to the classic “dark night of the soul” we discussed last week:

St. John of the Cross saw a “dark night” as an important preparation for a deeper spiritual life. The late Dr. Jerry May wrote that a dark night of the soul often frees us from the past, so that we can come to experience God more fully. May writes: “An ...

unsettling experience is the loss of the sense of God's presence, which can often feel like being abandoned by God. Many people are used to a consistent and long-lasting feeling of the presence of God in their lives. Then, sometimes, it disappears.

That, to May, is the dark night of the soul. He writes:

"...it is at the time they are going about their spiritual exercises with delight and satisfaction, the light shining most brightly on them that God darkens all this light and closes the door and spring of the sweet spiritual water they were tasting."

Nancy writes

What has been lost over the centuries, at least in Christianity, is the sense of gift even within a difficult spiritual experience. Whereas the ancient wisdom held out a treasure at the depths of such journeys, over-intellectualization of doctrine has truncated the archetype by taking the journeyer only into torment and punishment, not back out. In Christian terms, this is like stopping the narrative at the crucifixion—a loss which has carried over into an entire culture's understanding of suffering. When human intellect made hell eternal, we forgot about the treasure that is always in the deeps. As a consequence, we have learned suffering and judgment but ignore restoration. The experiences we are concerned with are incontrovertibly frightening; but it is our doing that they are labeled 'negative.' It is time, once again, to look for the richness that lies within these extraordinary encounters.

Bush, Nancy Evans (2012-04-09). *Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near-Death Experiences* (Kindle Locations 3265-3274). Nancy Evans Bush. Kindle Edition.

So, we are back with Swedenborg's concept of "hell." Many of us – myself included – have looked to NDE's of evidence of Swedenborg's contentions about life after death. Yet, in the vast majority of cases, the person has not clinically died, and could be experiencing a mystical episode, similar to a dream state. In such a state, all of the archetypes of humanity can come forth and be acted out. They all have meaning to us in the present in this life. They are not necessarily a preview of what our death will be like.

What is important is to remember a core Swedenborgian concept that heaven and hell are states of mind more than places to Swedenborg. We are creating them every day on the earth and in the after-life. What is important to us is that we are never "sent" to hell. Only those who choose that state are there. There is no punishing God who will punish some NDE'rs with a hellish experience because they deserve it. Life is filled with horrible experiences because it is earthly life; not because is punishing some of us. Years after her "hellish" NDE, Nancy Bush realized that the circles she saw were the Chinese yin-yang symbol and that they perhaps held a message about the wholeness of light and dark.

Swedenborg was insistent on the importance of moving beyond dualism. Spirit and matter, love and wisdom, male and female, heaven and hell all had to be seen in their wholeness.



Have you had any uncomfortable experiences as NDE's or mystical experiences or dreams? What meaning have they had for you?

Let us pray.



Lord, When I'm tired,bring me inspiration and rest; When I'm stressed and resentful, bring me calm and acceptance; When I am confused and chaotic bring me focus and clarity; when I am lonely and lost; bring me companions and love. Thank you Lord for your loving mercy and direction, let me turn to you always in all times both good and bad. I know you are ever with me, will direct my way with your sweet quiet voice, and light my path with your love. AMEN.

Rev. Judith



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

Is Hell Forever?

February 24, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Psalm 23

King James Version (KJV)

23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Swedenborg

I desire to state this fact, for I know it to be true, for I have perceived it, that many ... [in hell] have been raised from hell and torments into heaven where they now live ... SE 228

Journey from Hell to Heaven



by Rev. Wilma

In the movie, *What Dreams May Come*, hell was a difficult place to leave. Those who went there were inclined to create places of suffering for themselves. When Ann Collins arrived in hell after suicide, her husband Chris, residing in heaven, was distraught. He overcame incredible obstacles traveling through hell until he found her. He reminded her of what it was to love, and they moved together to heaven. The movie was based on the novel by Richard Matheson, a man who had

read Swedenborg. There was much discussion in Swedenborgian circles about how much the movie reflected a Swedenborgian view of heaven and hell.

One of questions raised was whether Swedenborg believed it was possible to ever leave hell after entering there. There are some differences of opinion about Swedenborg's view of this question.

Swedenborg seems to discuss a period of time for one to make a decision. Wilson Van Dusen says: *Swedenborg found that there are few people whose natures are so settled and sure that they enter heaven or hell within a few moments, of entering the afterlife. But since most of us are a mixture of good and evil, the usual process of selection can take days, weeks, or months -- even up to 30 years.*

So, one can take a long time in the spirit world deciding on heaven or hell. But if one chooses hell, is that permanent? I love what Rev. Dr. Bob Kirven wrote about this. He was a professor at the Swedenborg School of Religion for many years and taught Swedenborgian theology. He wrote that there is a controversial issue in Convention, generally called the "eternity of the hells." He writes:

In Heaven and Hell #480 (and Secrets of Heaven #10749, True Christianity #399, and several other passages), Swedenborg seems to say pretty plainly that the hells are eternal and everyone who joins them stays there eternally.

However, there are some other statements, which caused a lot of controversy around the turn of the twentieth century:

"I desire to state this fact, for I know it to be true, for I have perceived it, that many ... [in hell] have been raised from hell and torments into heaven where they now live ...SE 228

"[In a large vat in hell], there are none of those there who perished in the time of the Flood, but they have been brought out ... and there are those who have been created anew. " SE 286

Also, SE 1497, read in the light of SE 1928, indicates that certain spirits remain in a dungeon in hell "for centuries, until their former life is altered. ... Thus their former life dies, although still it remains." After this, they were enabled by a 'superadded gift' to live among angels. Whether you read this as complementary or contradictory to Heaven and Hell 480 is a subjective judgment, not an objective one.

It is interesting that Swedenborg didn't start to write Secrets of Heaven until he had reached #3427 or so of Spiritual Experiences. There was a controversy, early on, over whether Swedenborg originally didn't believe in the eternity of the hells and changed his mind later. When that controversy was at its height,

Convention's Council of Ministers held an open meeting to discuss the issue. The meeting was packed but failed to reach a conclusion, so a committee of ministers was appointed to do further research in the matter. The committee never reported back and never was discharged, and all its members have died. I do not know whether or not they are continuing their research. [Kirven, A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology, ch. 10.]

Since Kirven himself is now in the spiritual world, he has undoubtedly had a chance to look up that committee, and get a definitive answer!

In [*Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near-Death Experiences*](#), Nancy Bush explores the concept that hell and heaven can be created in our minds, and can be changed.

She writes about people who had a negative near-death experience, and she points out that what appears to be an experience of hell, can be turned around into a valuable spiritual experience. These can happen in several ways:

One is that most negative NDE's become positive if the person relaxes and becomes open to what is happening.

In some accounts we find the suggestion that a shift toward the positive occurs when the individual stops fighting the unfamiliar experience and simply accepts it. Kenneth Ring has suggested that perhaps a few people get "stuck" in the frightening aspects of their NDE and are unable to move beyond it; if they could "go with it," he reasons, the fear might resolve into peace. (Ring, 1980, 249)

Another way is when people use the "negative" experience to improve the quality of their lives.

Among people whose NDE was genuinely terrifying and even hellish, it is likely that most fit this model. They understand the message of the NDE as simple: This is a warning; something in your life is wrong and must change, or there will be unwelcome outcomes. Often with great anxiety, the experiencers search themselves for behaviors they think might have precipitated such an NDE, and they take steps to stop those behaviors. They look for avenues by which to modify their lives and temper their fear and residual anxieties. In some religious terms, they identify their sin and take steps to atone for it. This literalized interpretation appears especially among people who described their experience as explicitly helllike and have taken a concretistic attitude toward it. "I was being shown that I had to shape up or ship out, one or the other. In other words, 'get your act together,' and I did just that."

Bush, Nancy Evans (2012-04-09). *Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near-Death Experiences* (Kindle Locations 831-838). Nancy Evans Bush. Kindle Edition.

Another way is by "embracing the dark," Bush writes: ***"One does not become***

enlightened by imagining figures of light,” said Jung (1945, 14) “but by making the darkness conscious.”

Bush, Nancy Evans (2012-04-09). *Dancing Past the Dark: Distressing Near-Death Experiences* (Kindle Locations 1078-1079). Nancy Evans Bush. Kindle Edition.

She makes this valuable point about suffering:

What has been lost over the centuries, at least in Christianity, is the sense of gift even within a difficult spiritual experience. Whereas the ancient wisdom held out a treasure at the depths of such journeys, over-intellectualization of doctrine has truncated the archetype by taking the journeyer only into torment and punishment, not back out. In Christian terms, this is like stopping the narrative at the crucifixion—a loss which has carried over into an entire culture’s understanding of suffering. When human intellect made hell eternal, we forgot about the treasure that is always in the deeps. As a consequence, we have learned suffering and judgment but ignore restoration. The experiences we are concerned with are incontrovertibly frightening; but it is our doing that they are labeled ‘negative.’ It is time, once again, to look for the richness that lies within these extraordinary encounters. With this clearly in mind, it is possible to look at disturbing NDEs and from a fresh perspective, with a goal of healing our misunderstandings and growing into a fuller understanding.

What is hell? Is it a place some people go to after death? Is it a kind of experience people can have in a form of near-death encounter? Is it part of everyday life of earth? Yes! It is all of these.

From Swedenborg, we learn that heaven and hell are places that we create on earth, and then continue to create and choose after death.

The best way to avoid hell is to start NOW to transform hellish experiences into heavenly ones. Perhaps the most profound way to do this is to follow suggestions by Nancy Bush in her book -- that we work at finding growth in our negative experiences. We can explore our dreams, visions, fears, or NDEs by going deeply within ourselves.

Bush writes: *Trying to piece together the meaning of a near-death or similar experience—whether glorious or horrifying—is much like studying literature or scripture: There are always levels of meaning.*

This is what Swedenborg taught us about scripture. There is literal level, but there are also deeper levels of spiritual and celestial meanings for us. Perhaps any "hellish" experiences in life can be probed for spiritual meaning and guidance. Nancy encourages us to consider therapy and/or spiritual direction to find inner meanings in our lives.

That is not to suggest that God sends us bad experiences in life to teach us



lessons. But, God is the transformative force that can help us change horrible events into opportunities for new growth and change. If we live our lives with this attitude, we invite God to work with us every moment to change our hells into heavens. I feel certain that God continues that journey with us after physical death.

Is hell forever? Perhaps it is if we shut God out. If we invite God in, I believe that any hells -- in our early life or in the afterlife, can be transformed into heavens.

What are your experiences of inviting God to help you transform tragedy into opportunity to grow, learn, change, and serve?

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

"Our beloved Lord, help us to remember You
when the hellacious times batter us with
doubts, fears and helpless feelings. We are in constant
growth and transition in this world, walking through
in these confusing times with faint hearts failing faith, and wishing for
strength and stability. Help us to know that faith, full hearts, strength,
and stability come from you and are nestled deep inside our hearts
for this is where you dwell in us. Thank you for bringing us your love
and light. Keep us on the path of love serving you with our talents,
minds and hearts. We are grateful. AMEN.

Love, Rev. Judith

Sin & Salvation

March 3, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Matthew 13

New International Version (NIV)

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear."

Swedenborg

[2] People who know what sin is and especially those who know a lot about it from the Word and who teach about it, but who do not examine themselves and therefore see no sin within themselves, can be compared to people who scrape and save money, only to put it away in boxes and containers and make no other use of it than looking at it and counting it. They are like people who collect pieces of gold and silver jewelry and keep them in a safe in a storage room for no other purpose than to own them. They are like the businessman who hid his talent in the ground and the one who wrapped his mina in a handkerchief (Matthew 25:25; Luke 19:20). They are like the hardened pathways and rocks onto which the seed fell (Matthew 13:4, 5). They are like fig trees with abundant foliage that bear no fruit (Mark 11:13). They are like hearts of stone that have not turned to flesh ([Ezekiel 36:26]; Zechariah 7:12). They are "like partridges that nest but do not bear young. They amass riches, but without judgment. In the middle of their days they leave their riches behind and at the end of their [lives] they become fools" (Jeremiah 17:11). They are also like the five young women who had lamps but no oil (Matthew 25:1–12).

TC, NCE, #527

Sin & Salvation



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



by Rev. Wilma

We are in the season of Lent, and only four weeks away from Easter. Our topic this year is “The Spiritual World,” and this season is a good time to consider how we prepare ourselves for a heavenly eternity. That process is quite different for Swedenborg than it is for much of the Christian world.

What is sin?

What it is not:

We are *not* born evil, as a punishment from the sins of Adam. Some traditions consider us to be born as sinners, who need salvation from Christ.

What it is:

My friend, the evil we inherit comes in fact from no other source than our own parents. What we inherit, though, is not evil that we ourselves actually commit but an inclination toward evil. [TC, 521]

We all have an inclination towards evil, because humans before us have committed sins. However, it is not part of our nature; it is something we do.

The evil that is sinful is simply evil against our neighbor; and evil against our neighbor is also evil against God, which is what sin is. Nevertheless, having a concept of sin does nothing for us unless we examine the actions we have taken in our lives and see whether we have either openly or secretly done any such thing. [TC, 525]

What is salvation?

What it is not:

To Swedenborg, it is not about having a belief in something [e.g. in the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection], but it is about living our lives in a particular way.

What it is:

It is a process of self improvement and spiritual that he calls “Regeneration.” This has 3 steps:

Repentance
Reformation
Regeneration

During this month, we’re going to look at each of these concepts.

What is repentance?

The question then is, How are we to repent? The answer is, we are to do so actively. That is, we are to examine ourselves, recognize and admit to our sins, pray to the Lord, and begin a new life. The fact that repentance is not possible without examining ourselves was shown under the previous heading [§§526–527]. And what is the point of examining ourselves unless we recognize our sins? What is the point of that recognition unless we admit that those sins are in us? What is the point of all three of these steps unless we confess our sins before the Lord, pray for his help, and then begin a new life, which is the purpose of the whole exercise? This is active repentance. 539

Many people feel that Swedenborg's concept of regeneration is portrayed well in the 12 steps of A.A. Whether or not the founders of AA were influenced by Swedenborg is unclear. However, this history of possible connections is fascinating.

Who was Lois Burnham Wilson? [1891-1988]

She was the daughter of Dr. Clark and Matilda Burnham. Her grandfather, Nathan Burnham, had been a Swedenborgian minister and served in Lancaster, PA. Her father was an active participant in the circle of New York Swedenborgians. Her family purchased a vacation home on Emerald Lake in VT.

One of the Swedenborgian families who spent summers on that lake was the Seekamp's. Young Lois Seekamp knew the Burnham kids; in fact, she was named after Lois Burnham. Dr. Burnham was their family physician. As an adult, Lois Seekamp married George Dole – our Swedenborgian minister in Bath, Maine.

Lois' brother, Roger, became friends with a young man who lived near the lake: Bill Wilson. When Lois was 22, Bill came to their home selling lanterns. They were married in at the NY Swedenborgian Church.

A few folks are still around who remember Dr. Burnham and Lois in church, and then remember Bill and Lois attending together for a while.

Rev. Jim Lawrence wrote to Lois [Burnham] Wilson in 1987 asking whether her Swedenborgian roots had influenced the development of the 12 steps. She wrote back: "I don't believe being a Swedenborgian had a direct influence, but it did much to make me ready for the message of the 12 steps which based on the 6 principles of the Oxford group." One of the New Church ministers [I think it was Grant Schnarr] also wrote with a similar question and got back a similar answer, with her adding that even if it were true, she wouldn't tell anyone because of the importance of AA being separate from any religion.

Grant Schnarr's book: *Spiritual Recovery, a 12 Step Guide*, uses the 12 steps to facilitate our spiritual growth. He says: "The similarities found between Swedenborg's teachings about spirituality, and those found in the twelve-step philosophy are astounding." [page x]

He also says: These steps ... have existed in many religions, philosophies, and psychologies

throughout the ages. ... they work not only for the addictive-compulsive person, but for all people who desire to grow spiritually." [xiii]

In what ways have you used in "repentance" in your life for times you have hurt others or turned away from God? Have you used the 12 steps to do this, or any particular spiritual format?

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

"Heavenly Father, our beloved Lord, we ask for revelation of our defects of behavior and character so that we may repent and change how we are in our world. We want to serve you better and increase in our devotion to you. Help us change ourselves so that our service to you and your people grows more and more as we change. Please help us to do your will and follow your guidance. Give us the blessing of your influx and grace.
Thank you Lord, Amen."

Love, Rev. Judith

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord

March 10, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Isaiah 40:3

King James Version (KJV)

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Matthew 3

King James Version (KJV)

3 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Swedenborg

Scriptural Confirmations (Whitehead) n. 1717. Fifteen. *(The voice of one that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God: for the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (Isa. 40:3-5).)*

(O Zion that tellest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem that tellest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength, say, Behold your God! Behold the Lord Jehovih cometh with strength, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him and the recompense of His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs into His arm, and carry them in His bosom, He shall gently lead those that give suck (Isa. 40:9-11).)



539 There are two duties that we are obliged to perform after we have examined ourselves: prayer and confession [tcr 538]

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord



by Rev. Wilma

It was 1971, and a young graduate student at Carnegie-Mellon university [named John-Michael Tebelek] had his masters thesis due in two weeks, and he was stuck. He wrote:

...Finally, I turned toward the Gospels and sat one afternoon and read the whole thing through. Afterwards, I became terribly excited because I found what I wanted to portray on stage.

It was Easter morning, and he decided to go to an Easter sunrise service.

When I went into the cathedral, everyone there was sitting, grumbling about the snow, and the fact that they had already changed their tires. They weren't going to be able to take pictures that afternoon. Snow was upsetting their plans. As the service began, I thought it might be a little different. Instead, an old priest came out and mumbled into a microphone, and people mumbled things back, and then everyone got up and left. Instead of "healing" the burden, or resurrecting the Christ, it seems those people had pushed Him back into the tomb. They had refused to let Him come out that day.

Then, as he was leaving the church, he had a startling experience:

As I was leaving the church, a policeman who had been sitting two pews ahead of me during the service, stopped me and wanted to know if he could search me. Apparently he had thought I was ducking into the church to escape the snowstorm. At that moment—I think because of the absurd situation—it angered me so much that I went home and realized what I wanted to do with the Gospels: I wanted to make it the simple, joyful message that I felt the first time I read them and recreate the sense of community, which I did not share when I went to that service. I went to my teachers at Carnegie and asked if I could work at my own special project for my masters' degree, and they agreed.



Do you know what his Master's Thesis was? It was a musical that he called "Godspell" from the old English word from "godspell"; the old English root of "Gospels." It was based on the Gospel of Matthew, with most of the words taken from the Episcopal hymnal.



It became a great hit on Broadway, and had a revival in 2011-2012.

Tebelek suffered from agoraphobia and obesity. He died of a heart attack in 1985 at the age of 36.

One of the most powerful songs in this show is "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord." It is about the repentance we need in order to be ready to receive the Lord in our hearts.

It is a theme Swedenborg wrote about a great deal.
What is repentance? Swedenborg says:

Active Repentance Is Examining Ourselves, Recognizing and Admitting Our Sins, Praying to the Lord, and Beginning a New Life [TR]

It is NOT an oral confession in public.

518 A similarly hypocritical form of worship is found among those who have convinced themselves of the modern-day belief that through his suffering on the cross, the Lord took away all the sins of the world, which they take to mean the sins of anyone who

utters formulaic prayers about appeasement and mediation. Some such people are indeed capable of standing in the pulpit and, with a loud voice as if they were ablaze with passion, pouring forth one holy thought after another about repentance and goodwill, even though they themselves view repentance and goodwill as having no value for our salvation. They take “repentance” to mean nothing more than oral confession, and “goodwill” to mean nothing more than acts of public charity.

True repentance is the beginning of the Church within us. We begin by examining ourselves.



What do we do after we examine ourselves?

There are two duties that we are obliged to perform after we have examined ourselves: prayer and confession. The prayer is to be a request that [the Lord] have mercy on us, give us the power to resist the evils that we have repented of, and provide us an inclination and desire to do what is good, since “without him we cannot do anything” (John 15:5). The confession is to be that we see, recognize, and admit to our evils and that we are discovering that we are miserable sinners. There is no need for us to list our sins before the Lord and no need to beg that he forgive them. The reason we do not need to list our sins before the Lord is that we searched

But we don't want to simply beg God to forgive our sins.

[2] There are two reasons why we should not beg the Lord to forgive our sins. The first is that sins are not abolished, they are just relocated within us. They are laid aside when after repentance we stop doing them and start a new life. This is because there are countless yearnings that stick to each evil in a kind of cluster; these cannot be set aside in a moment, but they can be dealt with in stages as we allow ourselves to be reformed and regenerated. The second reason is that the Lord is mercy itself. Therefore he forgives the sins of all people. He blames no one for any sin. ...

How forgiving, then, is the Lord? It does no harm, though, for people who are weighed down by a heavy conscience to lighten their load by listing their sins before a minister of the church, for the sake of absolution. Doing so introduces them to the habit of examining themselves and reflecting on their daily evils. Nevertheless, this type of confession is earthly in nature, whereas the confession described above is spiritual.

SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL; Rose, Jonathan S. (2011-06-01). True Christianity, vol. 2: The Portable New Century Edition (NW CENTURY EDITION) (Kindle Locations 1869-1874). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.



So, how does Swedenborg encourage us to "prepare ye the way of the Lord" -- prepare for accepting the Lord into our hearts? He has three steps: examination, confession, and prayer.

In the quiet of prayer, reflect on whatever you have done that you did for selfish purposes, and that causes harm to another. Tell God you want to move beyond that behavior, and ask for God's help and guidance. Then live "day by day" to see God more clearly, love God more dearly, and follow God more nearly.

To "repent" means to start living our lives differently. Just do things differently.

Then, we have repented. And we have started to reform ourselves.

Next week, we'll look at Swedenborg's "reformation."



Rev. Judith

" Heavenly Lord of all that is, we come to You this day to ask for your guidance in our lives. We err so often in what we think is your direction, and it turns out that we are wrong. Help us to hear your voice, to be humble in putting your direction into action, and give us your love and peace to dwell in. Thank you our Heavenly Father for our very lives. Give us the blessing of your wisdom, love, and regeneration. AMEN.
Love, Rev. Judith

Bones Alive!

March 17, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Ezekiel 37

New International Version (NIV)

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[a] enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophecy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'"

Swedenborg

Our regeneration is portrayed in Ezekiel as the dry bones on which sinews were placed; then flesh, and skin, and spirit was breathed into them, and they came to life (Ezekiel 37:1–14). The following words in that story make it obvious that it represents regeneration: "These bones are the whole house of Israel" (Ezekiel 37:11). There is also a comparison there involving graves. We read that God will open graves and cause bones to rise up out of them, and he will put spirit in them and place them in the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:12, 13, 14). The land of Israel here and elsewhere means the church. Bones and graves were used to represent regeneration because people who have not been regenerated are called the dead, and people who have been regenerated are called the living. The former are spiritually dead, but the latter are spiritually alive. [TC, NCE, 594]

SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL; Rose, Jonathan S. (2011-06-01). True Christianity, vol. 2: The Portable New Century



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

Edition (NW CENTURY EDITION) (Kindle Locations 2708-2714). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.

Now that repentance has been treated, the next topic in order is our reformation and regeneration. These two both follow our repentance and are moved forward by it. There are two states that we all inevitably enter into and go through if we are to turn from an earthly person into a spiritual person. The first state is called reformation, the second is called regeneration. In the first state we look from our earthly self toward having a spiritual self; being spiritual is what we long for. In the second state we become someone who is both spiritual and earthly. The first state is brought about by truths (these have to be truths related to faith); through these truths we aim to develop goodwill. The second state is brought about by good actions that come from goodwill; through these actions we come [more deeply] into truths related to faith. SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL; Rose, Jonathan S. (2011-06-01). True Christianity, vol. 2: The Portable New Century Edition (NW CENTURY EDITION) (Kindle Locations 2283-2285). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.

Bones Alive!



by Rev. Wilma

Those who start a spiritual journey come alive! Once we begin this journey, we are like old, dry bones in which God breathes new life!

We've been talking about the first stage of regeneration: repentance. The next two stages are reformation and regeneration itself. Swedenborg has a beautiful way of describing them:

These two states can be compared to the increase of light and heat that occurs as the day progresses in springtime. The first state is like the early light before dawn, when the rooster crows. The second state is like the dawn and the morning. The further development within the second state is like the increase of light and heat as the day progresses toward noon.

In the state of reformation, we are ready to be different. In this week's chat, we looked at the sins of modern, spiritual people. We realized that an unconscious sin for many white people is one of acting in racist ways. In repentance, one could desire to let go of racism. In reformation, one could engage in actions that work towards racial equality. One might still have very racist feelings inside, but one is striving to behave in a way that is different from the old attitudes left inside. When we reach the third stage of regeneration, we act in ways that support racial equality because that is who we are deep inside, and it wouldn't occur to us to act in any other way. It is how we behave naturally without giving it any thought.



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Love, Spirit, Life

One could also look at environmental change from this perspective. As we get close to Earth Day 2013, we can see the many struggles we have as a society and as individuals to change how we relate to our environment. Many of us individually had to come to understand how our everyday behaviors were destroying Mother Earth. We have learned to make countless small and big changes in our lives, such as recycling and using fuels more efficiently. As a society, however, we have not integrated sustained change. Swedenborg might say that we are in a state of reformation, striving to do things differently but not having changed deep inside.

Modern theories about change give us a way to look at Swedenborg's stages of regeneration in greater depth.

Kurt Lewin was a Jewish professor of psychology in Germany who emigrated to the U.S. when Hitler was gaining power. Lewin developed theories about how people and societies change and he is considered the founder of social psychology. In 1946 he was asked to help find ways to combat religious and racial prejudice. He developed "sensitivity" training which was very influential on humanist psychologist Carl Rogers. Lewin developed a theory of social change, which has greatly impacted many areas of psychology and sociology.

His theory of change has three stages:

Stage 1: Unfreezing

This is when we get ready to make a change. We realize that we have to change and that we have to leave our comfort zone. We start preparing ourselves to leave this zone.

Stage 2: Change - or Transition

Kurt Lewin saw change as a process over time. He called that process a transition. It is the journey we need to make in our lives to incorporate a change. People are 'unfrozen' and start moving in a new direction.

Stage 3: Freezing (or Refreezing)

In this stage, our recent change becomes the "new normal." It becomes our life, and we are comfortable with it.

Stages one and two are quite similar to Swedenborg's concept of "reformation." In this stage, we start making change, although it is uncomfortable and unfamiliar. When it becomes part of who we are, we are in "regeneration" rather than "reformation."

A more recent approach to change that came out of Lewin's work was developed in the late 1970's and early 1980's by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente at the University of Rhode Island. They were studying how smokers can give up their addiction. Their work is called the "Stages of Change Model" [SCM] and is now widely used in addictions counseling. It shows the many stages a person needs to go through to give up an addiction. A person with an addiction usually needs support through a number of stages before they have understood and integrated a change in their lives.

Their stages of change are:

Precontemplation (Not yet acknowledging that there is a problem behavior that needs to be changed)

Contemplation (Acknowledging that there is a problem but not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change)

Preparation/Determination (Getting ready to change)

Action/Willpower (Changing behavior)

Maintenance (Maintaining the behavior change) and

Relapse (Returning to older behaviors and abandoning the new changes)

Transcendence (the change becomes part of who you are)

It is interesting that “relapse” is a normal part of integrating change. Most people go back to the old behavior at least once before they are ready to completely give it up.

Then one enters the final stage: “Transcendence.” It is what Swedenborg called “regeneration.” In this final stage, you have made the change an integral part of your life. It has become who you are on the inside as well as being your behavior on the outside.

Stages #1-3 might be considered Swedenborg’s “repentance” when you are recognize that there are things in your life that you need to change, In stages #4-6, you are in Swedenborg’s “reformation” where you are actually making changes. However, the changes have not yet become integrated into the essence of who you are. That is the “transcendence” that Swedenborg called “regeneration.”

I find Stages of Change Theory invaluable as a social worker. Recently, "Judy" came to me because her husband was about to leave her and her boss was about to fire her. As I heard the whole story, it was clear that Judy had a serious problem with alcohol that either caused or exacerbated the other problems. I could have just told her to stop drinking, given her a list of A.A. meetings, and said not to come back until she had stopped drinking and was attending A.A. I would probably have never seen her again, and she would probably not have stopped drinking anytime soon. I knew that the best way to help her was to suggest some of my questions and concerns, and invite her to join me in exploring the issues in her life. Instead of telling Judy what her problem was, I invited her to join me in coming to understand it herself. Slowly, I helped Judy see for herself the problems alcohol was causing in her life. I walked with her through pre-contemplative, contemplative, and determination to change. I'm walking with her still as she stops drinking, goes to A.A. -- and relapses. We'll be walking for quite a while. This is how change happens.

Swedenborg says that Ezekiel's "dry bones" is a story of regeneration. That means it is not something God just does to the bones. It means that God invites us to work at changing the bones through stages of repentance and reformation before they are fully alive and dancing again. In other words, regenerating those old bones might involve taking some calcium and doing some exercises to get them moving



again! It **can** happen if God breathes into them **AND** we walk through making some significant changes in our life! Swedenborg's regeneration is about us working as a team with God over a long period of time.

In what areas of your life have you made changes in behaviors? What has that process of change been like? How have you been able to incorporate the changes into the essence of who you are?

Where would you like to make changes now ... or where do you think is calling you to change? How could you and God work together to bring about those changes?



"Holy Lord, we give thanks for the times that you call us into action when we least expect it. Thank you for showing us where we need to change in our lives through service to others. We are grateful for your love, and your direction for regeneration and prayer. All things can be done through your Love and Will. Amen.

Love Rev. Judith

Ho Sannah

March 24, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Mark 11

The Triumphal Entry

1As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

4They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna![a]"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"[b]

10"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

"Hosanna in the highest!"

Swedenborg

458. their having palms in their hands signifies that the good of truth was in them, or that they were in the good of truth. The good of truth, when possessed by any one, is the good of life, for truth becomes good by a life in agreement with it, previously it is not good in anyone.

A.C.

TC 610 The following needs to be added to what has been stated so far: Our regeneration does not happen in a moment. It gradually unfolds from the beginning all the way to the end of our lives in this world; and after this life is over, it continues and is perfected.

People who have been regenerated are like the oil lamps on the lampstand in the tabernacle. They are also like the showbread and the incense on the table and the altar there. They are the people in Daniel 12:3 who are as radiant as the brightness of the firmament and who shine like the stars for an age and forever.

TC 606

SWEDENBORG, EMANUEL; Rose, Jonathan S. (2011-06-01). True Christianity, vol. 2: The Portable New Century Edition (NW CENTURY EDITION) (Kindle Locations 2902-



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2905). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.

Ho Sanna!



by Rev. Wilma

Happy Palm Sunday!

Today, we remember the joyful and triumphant ride of Jesus into Jerusalem. He rode a donkey, and people were thrilled to see him. They waved palms in joy. They expected Jesus to be liberating them from political oppression, and the palms expressed that expectation.

The song “Ho Sannah” from Jesus Christ Superstar expresses this joy, and also foreshadows the events that will follow.

We now know what lies ahead in the coming days. There will be a Last Supper, remembered by Maundy Thursday. Jesus will be betrayed by Judas. Jesus will pray in the Garden of Gethsemane while the disciples sleep. He will be arrested and crucified, as we will remember on Good Friday. Then we will celebrate the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

The events of “Holy Week” can help us understand Swedenborg’s concept of “Regeneration.” We can all be regenerated, but it doesn’t happen quickly. It is a long process in which we may experience betrayals and crucifixions. We’ve been looking at repentance and reformation, which help prepare us for our regeneration.

However, nothing can prepare us for hard times and “dark nights of the soul” that lie along the road.

The importance of the resurrection, to Swedenborg, is to show us the process of regeneration and merging our human with the Divine. The process is not an easy one. For Jesus, it was the events of his final week – especially his time on the cross – that prepared him to fully empty himself of all that stood in the way between his humanity and full union with God.

This is a good week for each of us to ask the question: What lies in the way of our

complete union with the Divine? What is there that holds us back from the fullness of the Divine-human relationship?

This week is a good time for prayer and meditation on that question. Then, let go of whatever is in the way – so that next Sunday – on Easter – we can open ourselves to that joyful union!



Our Sweet Lord, who has created the earth and all the creatures and plants therein, we often forget to show our gratitude for the beautiful and wondrous planet we live on. We thank you Lord for the gift of life that we have and the awe inspiring planet that you have gifted us. Let us be better stewards of the world around us. Help us to be aware of the things we do each day that may harm our planet, and help us to change those habits so that our planet will be here for generations to come.

When we think of the celebration of Palm Sunday, let us be reminded of the honoring of our Lord that day by the multitude. The symbolic bowing down of all life to Him through the palm fronds laid at his feet. May we have the humility in the days ahead to honor our Lord and the earth created for us to inhabit humble hearts and acts. With deep gratitude for the life given to us and the beautiful planet we inhabit, we thank you. AMEN

Rev. Judith

Arise, Shine; Your Light Has Come

March 31, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Isaiah 60

New International Version (NIV)

The Glory of Zion60 “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

Matthew 28: 1-10 N.I.V.

The Resurrection

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."

Swedenborg

Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent. It was a means of glorifying his human nature; that is, of uniting that nature to his Father's divine nature.
... TC 114

Arise, Shine: Your Light Has Come



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



by Rev. Wilma

On Good Friday, I like watching the movie, "Changing Lanes." It takes place on the morning of Good Friday. Attorney Gavin Banke is racing to court to file an important paper that would bring in millions of dollars to his law firm. It is also a fraudulent piece of paper. The other man, Doyle Gipson, is racing to family court to fight for custody of his



As fate would have it, the two men collide on a busy street of New York City. In the ensuing confusion, Gavin accidentally leaves his important paper with Doyle. He races off, leaving Doyle by the side of the road with a disabled vehicle. By the time Doyle gets to court, he has lost custody of his sons. Because he was late, the hearing took place without him.

Doyle is furious, and wants revenge on Gavin. Gavin, facing a judge, tries to explain why he lost this crucial document. He spends the rest of the day trying to get it back from Doyle. He hires a man to ruin Doyle's financial standing, making Doyle increasingly determined to destroy the document.



During this one day, these two men move through the 3 stages of regeneration that we have focused on this month: repentance, reformation, and, finally -- regeneration. After

carrying out terribly evil acts against each other, they come to care for the other person and to repent of what they have done. They each try doing things differently in order to be helpful to the other. By the end of the movie, each man has been transformed, and is ready to lead a very different life.

This is only a movie. But it shows us how God leads us into repentance, then into reformation, and finally welcomes us to regeneration.

Of course, most of us do not travel through these states in a day. Swedenborg writes:

We can be regenerated only gradually. Each and every thing that exists in the physical world serves as an illustration of this fact. A seedling does not grow up into a mature tree in a single day. First there is a seed, then a root, then a shoot, which develops into a trunk; then branches come out of that and develop leaves and finally flowers and fruit. Wheat and barley do not spring up ready for harvest in a single day. A home is not built in a single day. We do not become full grown in a single day; reaching wisdom takes us even longer. The church is not established—let alone perfected—in a single day. We will make no progress toward a goal unless we first make a start. TC 586

Swedenborg describes what it is like to be in a state of regeneration:

People who have been regenerated, that is, people who have been made anew in will and intellect, are in the heat of heaven; that is, they have the love that heaven has. They are also in the light of heaven; that is, they have the wisdom heaven has. TC 605

There is a real difference when we move from reformation to regeneration:

These two states can be compared to the increase of light and heat that occurs as the day progresses in springtime. The first state is like the early light before dawn, when the rooster crows. The second state is like the dawn and the morning. The further development within the second state is like the increase of light and heat as the day progresses toward noon. TC 571

Easter is about entering the state of “regeneration.” Easter is about BEING different; not just ACTING in ways we think we should. It is doing good things that are good and



loving -- because that is who we are and what makes us happy.

The crucifixion and resurrection are about Jesus entering complete regeneration. Swedenborg called the process Jesus went through *glorification*, which is the human journey of regeneration. It was achieving complete oneness between the Divine and the human -- the Divine Human.



Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent. It was a means of glorifying his human nature; that is, of uniting that nature to his Father's divine nature. ... TC 114

Some traditions believe that Jesus had to die because humanity was so evil. They believe that we were born into evil, and Jesus had to save us. To Swedenborg, we are not born into evil. We are born with free will, but we have a tendency to do evil because we grow up seeing adults doing it. We do not need to be saved from the evil that we do; we need to learn to change ourselves through our own process of regeneration. We need to learn to *behave* differently, and then to *become* different.

When we do that, Swedenborg says we come into a state of union with God. This is what happened for Jesus on the cross:

The state of glorification is also the state of union.

The resurrection is an affirmation that humanity and Divinity are one. One is not evil and the other good. Rather we are mixture of love and wisdom. Divinity is pure love, flowing into us. Our humanity is “wisdom” with knowledge of life on the earth. When we do good works, we are performing “uses” with both our love and our wisdom. Love-wisdom-uses. Divine-human-action. We are one.

The resurrection is an affirmation that we and God are in union. We have always been in union and always will be. But sometimes we forget that. The resurrection reminds us that we are never separated

Easter is about our relationship with the Divine. Within that relationship, even the most miserable day – or period of one’s life, can be transformed into a step towards regeneration. Even a horrible time of suffering and dying on a cross can be transformed into a deeper relationship with God.

Easter is a time to celebrate our union with God. It is a time to arise and to allow the light of Love to shine through us as we share that light with the world.



ALLELUIA.

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

Oh, Holy One, thank you for the deep pool of peace within my Heart. A place inside of me that I have whenever I need the solitude and solace of your peace and deep love. There are no words to explain my union with you within that peace. You know what is in my heart, for you know me and accept me just as I am, always. You paint the true picture of me in my mind to emulate and grow into. Thank you, Beloved One. You are indeed alive and blessing my whole life with your sacred presence. Let me not forget this beauty and union with you throughout the coming days, months and years ahead, for they are the gifts of Saving Grace you have given to all.
Amen.

The Wild Flower's Heaven

April 7, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Job 12:7-10 *“But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In [the Lord’s] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.”*

Revelation 4:6b-11 *“And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne . . . they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.’”* (verses 9-11)

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

The Wild Flower's Heaven



Rev. Wilma

Alleluia!

We are in the Easter season, and it is glorious!

Easter is on my mind as I look around me in Maine. The piles of snow are almost completely melted. The crocuses are shooting up from the once-frozen ground. The world is coming alive again! Alleluia!



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Swedenborg tells us that the resurrection of Jesus is an expression of rebirth and renewal. We also see this concept in the earth itself; year after year.

Swedenborg has a radically profound understanding of the earth. All of creation is not just FROM God; all of creation IS God. Jesus was not the son of God; Jesus WAS God. God came to the earth in the body of Jesus. The same God is constantly flowing into the earth through what Swedenborg calls “influx.”

Of the influx of heaven into the world, and of the influx of the soul into all things of the body, from experience ... Nothing exists of or from itself, but from what is prior to itself, thus all things from the First ... Hence it is plain that all things subsist perpetually from the first esse, because they exist from it HD 277

“Esse” is the Latin verb “to be.” It is that which is. That which first existed, to Swedenborg, was The Lord.

Hence it is plain that all things subsist perpetually from the first esse, because they exist from it ... The all of life flows in from the First, because it is thence derived, thus from the Lord ... Every existere is from an esse, and nothing can exist unless its esse be in it.

For Swedenborg, “existere” is that which is emerging from the “esse” – it is all of creation that comes forth from the Lord. Everything that exists is that which emerges from the Lord. This is radical! NOTHING can exist unless “esse” – the Lord – is in it. All of humanity exists because God is flowing into us. All of the animals exist because God is flowing into them. All of the plants exist because God flows into them.

There is a general influx, its quality (n. 5850). It is a continual effort of acting according to order (n. 6211). This influx takes place into the lives of animals (n. 5850). And also into the subjects of the vegetable kingdom (n. 3648). That thought is formed into speech and will into gestures with man, according to this general influx (n. 5862, 5990, 6192, and 6211). [HD 277]

What is even more radical from Swedenborg is that even the rocks and the soil are “existere” – emerging through God flowing into them.

This is so radical that it basically takes us into quantum physics to understand it.

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things. [DLW 77]

George Dole says that that quote from Swedenborg reflects the Blake poem quoted at the top of the page.

Dole was thinking about this concept when he started reading Karl Pribram and David Bohm, quantum physicists. 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]

The 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 intersection 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 intersection 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.

And we need to love nature as ourselves; because it is part of us. If we dis-respect nature, we are dis-respecting humanity. If we dis-respect humanity we are disrespecting God.

We truly are all one.

So now we can see the depth in Blake's words: " a heaven in a wildflower." Heaven is in the wildflower. God's loving existence flows into the flower. All of heaven is inside of each little flower.

This is radical. From a Swedenborgian perspective, ecotheology is about how the entire world IS God. *[see bottom of side panel for more information on "ecotheology."]*

What is "ecotheology"? It is how we can use theology [concepts of God] to understand the ecology of the earth. Next week we'll look at some perspectives from "ecotheology" on how God exists in nature from various traditions.

This week, look around you, and notice the wildflowers. Look closely, to see heaven there.

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

Beloved Lord, who knows all that is in our hearts. Help us to change somber colors in our lives for happy colors full of light and warm colors full of your Love. Let us focus on this day only, not on the yesterdays or the tomorrows for they leave us with many days not lived fully and tend to keep us in somber colors. Thank you for the light and love you bring us each day as we focus on you and what colors we paint today. With deep gratitude for the life you give us and the



Bright & Beautiful Things

April 14, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

John 1:3

All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Psalm 19:1

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Colossians 1:16-17

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 290290. *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.*

Bright and Beautiful Things



Rev. Wilma

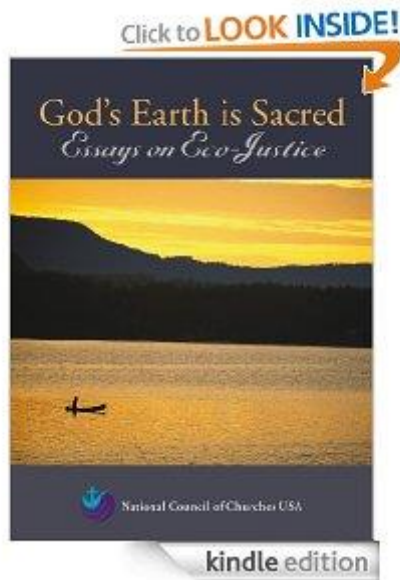
*All things bright and beautiful;
Creatures great and small.
The Lord God made them all.*

I love that simple song. It was published in 1848 in a hymn book for children, designed to raise money for deaf-mutes.

It was written by Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-95), wife to an Anglican Archbishop, as a way of expressing the opening of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The original song had a verse

that seemed to praise social hierarchy, and was removed along the way. The tune, Royal Oak, was arranged by Martin Shaw in 1915 from a traditional melody celebrating the restoration of Charles II in 1660.

This was, perhaps, an early attempt by the Christian church to honor God's creation. Things have progressed since then. I have spent this week immersed in a book published by the National Council of Churches eco-justice unit: *God's Earth is Sacred: Essays in Eco-Justice*.



This book is a collection of essays that respond to a statement on the environment that was published in 2004 as an ecumenical agreement:

Christian Ecological Affirmations of Faith and Confession

We stand with awe and gratitude as members of God's bountiful and good Creation. We rejoice in the splendor and mystery of countless species, our common creaturehood, and the interdependence of all that God makes. We believe that the Earth is home for all and that it has been created intrinsically good (Genesis). We lament that the human species is shattering the splendid gifts of this web of life, ignoring our responsibility for the well being of all life, while destroying species and their habitats at a rate never before known in human history.



We believe that, in boundless love that hungers for justice, God in Jesus Christ acts to restore and redeem all Creation (including human beings). God incarnate affirms all Creation (John 1:14), which becomes a sacred window to eternity. In the cross and resurrection we know that God is drawn into life's most brutal and broken places and there brings forth healing and liberating power. That saving action restores right relationships among all members of "the whole Creation" (Mark 16:15). We confess that instead of living and proclaiming this salvation through our very lives and worship, we have abused and exploited the Earth and people on the margins of power and privilege, altering climates, extinguishing species, and jeopardizing Earth's capacity to sustain life as we know and love it. We believe that the created world is sacred—a revelation of God's power and gracious presence filling all things. This sacred quality of Creation demands moderation and sharing, urgent antidotes for our excess in consumption and waste, reminding us that economic justice is an essential condition of ecological integrity. We cling to God's trustworthy promise to restore, renew, and fulfill all that God creates. We long for and work toward the day when churches, as embodiments of Christ on Earth, will respond to the "groaning of Creation" (Romans 8:22) and to God's passionate desire to "renew the face of the Earth" (Psalm 104:30). We look forward to the day when the lamentations and groans of Creation will be over, justice with peace will reign, humankind will nurture not betray the Earth, and all of Creation will sing for joy.

[Santmire, Paul; Rasmussen, Larry; Owens, Marcia ; Chryssavgis, John; Nash, Jim; Kearns, Laurel; Parker, Janet; Greenway, Bill; Jenkins, Willis (2011-12-14). *God's Earth is Sacred: Essays on Eco-Justice* (Kindle Locations 268-283). National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program. Kindle Edition.]



The essays in this book point out that historically, the Christian Church has not always supported the environment. Author Laurel Kearns discusses the concept of "dominion". She says that in 1967 historian Lynn White charged that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for the ecological crisis because of its interpretation of dominion, from Genesis 1:28.

This is Gen. 1:28 in the King James's Version

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 air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

A concept of "stewardship" has grown from Genesis 2:15

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.



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The concepts of “dominion” and “stewardship” have become terms of ruling over the environment. Kearns writes:

The dominant interpretation that emerged in the past few hundred years leaned toward interpreting the concept of dominion as a human dictatorship in which all of the non-human subjects are viewed as “resources” for the dictator’s advancement or betterment. This is why so much of the work of contemporary Creation care advocates focuses on reinterpreting human relationships with the rest of the Creation and advocating the human role of caretaker/steward instead of reckless consumer or selfish overLord.

Fortunately, Swedenborg offers a different interpretation of these passages:

Swedenborg’s view of Gen. 1:28 from "Secrets of Heaven":

Anything we do on our own is evil through and through, but since we are engaged in the process of being reborn, we have a trace—the smallest possible trace—of goodness. [4] Later, as faith becomes more closely connected with love, it grows larger—a plant. When the connection is completed, it turns into a tree, and then the birds of the heavens (which here as before [§§11; 40:1, 3; 48] are true ideas, or the contents of the intellect) nest in its branches (the facts we know). When we are spiritual people or are becoming spiritual, we are subject to conflict; and this is why it says harness the earth, and rule.



He sees this as a directive from God to working on becoming spiritual, by addressing our inner conflicts.

Secrets of Heaven:

122 Genesis 2:15. *And Jehovah God took the human and put the human in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to guard it. The Garden of Eden symbolizes everything in a heavenly person, which is the subject here. Cultivating the garden and guarding it means that such a person is free to enjoy all of those things but not to claim personal possession of them, because they are the Lord’s.*

123 *Heavenly people acknowledge, because they perceive, that absolutely everything is the Lord’s. Spiritual people too acknowledge it, but only in speech, because they have learned it from the Word. Worldly and body centered people do not accept or agree with the idea; they claim as their own any ability they discover inside themselves, and if they lose it, they consider it completely destroyed.*

Swedenborg’s view brings us closer to environmental perspectives of some other religions. Let's take a look at environmental statements from other religious traditions:



Buddhist Statement:

Today we live in a time of great crisis, confronted by the gravest challenge that humanity has ever faced: the ecological consequences of our own collective karma. ...
As signatories to this statement of Buddhist principles, we acknowledge the urgent challenge of climate change. We join with the Dalai Lama in endorsing the 350 ppm target. In accordance with Buddhist teachings, we accept our individual and collective responsibility to do whatever we can to meet this target, including (but not limited to) the personal and social responses outlined above.
We have a brief window of opportunity to take action, to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth. Future generations, and the other species that share the biosphere with us, have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom, and leadership. We must listen to their silence. We must be their voice, too, and act on their behalf.



Baha'i Statement:

For over 20 years, the Bahá'ís of the United States have worked with others to advance environmental awareness and sustainable development. Much of the inspiration for doing so comes from the Bahá'í sacred writings, which are imbued with a deep respect for the natural world and for the interconnectedness of all things.
For Bahá'ís, nature is seen as a divine trust that reflects the qualities and attributes of God and, as such, should be cherished. Like the adherents of other faith traditions, Bahá'ís are called upon to be stewards of the environment.



Islam Statement:

The first Islamic principle that relates to conservation is that of the Oneness of Allah, or Tawheed. This principle is absolutely fundamental to Islam. Every Muslim must believe in this Oneness of Allah. It is said

by some Ulamaa that some two-thirds of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) early preaching—and indeed of the Qur'an itself—were and are dedicated purely to endorsing this very Oneness of Allah. One indivisible God means to a Muslim that there is no separate deity for each of the many attributes that to Muslims belong to the One Universal God who is also God of the Universe.

Tawheed is the monotheistic principle of Islam and it begins by declaring that “there is no God but God” (the second half of this declaration asserts that “Muhammad is His Messenger”). We are for the present concerned with the first part, which affirms that there is nothing other than the Absolute, the Eternal, All Powerful Creator. This is the bedrock statement of the Oneness of the Creator from which stems everything else.

It is the primordial testimony of the unity of all creation and the interlocking grid of the natural order of which man is intrinsically a part.

God says in the Qur'an: Say: He is Allah the One and Only; Allah the Eternal Absolute; He begetteth not nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him. (112.001-4) God is Real, not an abstract idea or concept; He is One, the Everlasting Refuge for all creation.



Hindu:

The Hindu tradition understands that man is not separate from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus strive to do no harm. We hold a deep reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are bound to each other within life's cosmic web.

We are just over a week from Earth Day. What can we do this week to prepare for that celebration?

We have talked about regeneration during the past couple of months. This is a good opportunity to repent for personal and collective destruction of the environment.

The imperative first step is to repent of our sins, in the presence of God and one another. This repentance of our social and ecological sins will acknowledge the special responsibility that falls to those of us who are citizens of the United States.

The second step is to pursue a new journey together, with courage and joy. By God's grace, all things are made new. We can share in that renewal by clinging to God's trustworthy promise to restore and fulfill all that God creates and by walking, with God's help, a path different from our present course.

Re-read the Christian ecological declaration of faith and confession. And then, remember that Swedenborg - and many other traditions -- acknowledge that humanity, divinity -- and all of creation are one. Spend some time admiring and thanking a wild



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flower this week!

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

" God, maker of all our earth, show me what actions I can take today that will effect the changes I need to see in my environment. Keep me focused on nurturing my planet and my life by positive action in mind, word, and deed. Show me where I am polluting my own environment, and where I can effect change on my planet. Thank you, Lord for the Beautiful world I live in and the the power to change my planet, me and my actions. AMEN"



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Gods' Earth Day

April 21, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

"Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12:7-10)

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (Psalm 19:1-4; cf. Psalm 97:6)

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord." (Psalm 96:11-13)

"Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds." (Psalm 148:7-10)

Swedenborg

There is a general influx, its quality (n. 5850). It is a continual effort of acting according to order (n. 6211). This influx takes place into the lives of animals (n. 5850). And also into the subjects of the vegetable kingdom (n. 3648). That thought is formed into speech and will into gestures with man, according to this general influx (n. 5862, 5990, 6192, 6211). NJHD, 277

God's Earth Day



Rev. Wilma

What were you doing on April 22, 1970?

Many of you, of course, were not yet born, or were young children. I had just graduated from college as a social studies teacher, and was in my first year of teaching. "Earth Day" was initially seen as a radical, anti-war events. But as we got closer to April 22nd, the idea caught on the mainline media, and the high school officials asked me to please set up an assembly for the day!

One of Earth Day's initial inspiration may have been Rachel Carson's New York Times bestseller *Silent Spring* in 1962. The book sold half a million copies around the world; and it planted a seed for the environmental movement.

from the [Earth Day website](#):

Earth Day 1970 capitalized on the emerging consciousness, channeling the energy of the anti-war protest movement and putting environmental concerns front and center.

The idea came to Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson, then a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, after witnessing the ravages of the 1969 massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California. Inspired by the student anti-war movement, he realized that if he could infuse that energy with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution, it would force environmental protection onto the national political agenda. Senator Nelson announced the idea for a "national teach-in on the environment" to the national media; persuaded Pete McCloskey, a conservation-minded Republican Congressman, to serve as his co-chair; and recruited Denis Hayes as national coordinator. Hayes built a national staff of 85 to promote events across the land.

SUNDAY MORNING SUSTAINABILITY

The following information is based on a publication from the [National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Unit](#). Here is the [full publication](#).

What is your typical Sunday morning like? How do you use the earth's energy?

Many of us have similar Sunday morning routines. These routines, like our other daily activities, create an ecological "footprint," which impacts God's Creation—both people and planet. As we examine our routines and adjust them to create smaller ecological footprints, we can be better caretakers of God's Creation and we can improve lives around the world.

Here are some things that most of us do on a typical Sunday morning:

TURNING ON THE LIGHT



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...The pollution from power plants causes human health issues like asthma and heart disease. These health issues particularly impact low-income communities because they are more likely than moderate and high-income communities to be located near power plants.

Pathways for Change *Individuals and Churches*

Find out where your electricity comes from. Some utilities provide the option to purchase electricity from renewable resources. Look for ways to decrease your electricity consumption. Resources are available at www.energystar.gov.

COMMUNITY

Support efforts in your community, and contact your elected officials and policymakers to ask them to support infrastructure for renewable energy.

Turning on the Computer



Logging On, Networking In

For some of us, logging on to computers, smart phones, and tablets to check the news and catch up with friends and family is a morning routine. With more than 250 million internet users in the United States, the data stream that travels to and from each personal computer, tablet, and phone adds up to a flood of energy use. Much of this information passes through data centers filled with servers that are often continuously on, regardless of demand, sometimes wasting 90 percent or more of the electricity they use. ...But data centers represent just a fraction of the hidden costs of our digital devices. Child and slave laborers in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo

often mine the minerals used to make the inner workings of consumer electronics, a direct affront to our faith values for justice.

Pathways for Change Individuals and Churches

The average life span for a computer in the United States is less than two years. Consider ways you and your church can cut down on the electricity used from computers and how you can lengthen the lives of your electronic devices to reduce the amount of e-waste created. When it is time to get rid of a device, donate it to a charity that wants it or find an e-Stewards certified recycler at <http://e-stewards.org>. Learn how modern-day slavery impacts the goods you buy at www.slaveryfootprint.org.

Community

If there is an e-waste collection event in your community, encourage organizers to use an e-Stewards certified recycler. If there is none, consider hosting one. Tell recyclers in your community that you are concerned about the global impacts of e-waste and encourage them to become e-Stewards certified.

Voices of Faith

“ I don’t know what tallies as sacred for you but if water doesn’t qualify, you should check your pulse to see whether you are among the quick or the dead.”
Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary

A journey of a 1,000 miles begins with one step. Sometimes environmental issues seem overwhelming. Yet, we only need to begin with a single step.

The National Council of Churches is encouraging us to start by looking at a typical Sunday morning at home, and becoming aware of how our smallest actions can impact the environment. Then, let's look at how we can start with making small changes. The NCC is suggesting we look at not just what one individual can do, but what a church group can do, and what an entire community can do.

What energy resources do you use on a typical Sunday morning? Is there a way you can make a small change in those resources next Sunday? Next week, we'll look at the ways we can reach out into community, and work together to save God's earth.

Let us pray.



Rev. Judith

"Holy One, who gives us all on this earth, guide our hands, our hearts, our minds in the direction of all good things. May we preserve our earth and those who inhabit it. Help us to know and do the

highest and best that we know. We thank you for the Love we have each day, the Grace bestowed upon us daily. Through our actions may we be a blessing to all we come in contact with each

day and may we be blessed in return. AMEN."



The Critters' Choir

April 28, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

Genesis 9:8-11 *"Then God said to Noah. . . , 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.'"*

Job 12:7-10 *"Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." (Job 12:7-10)*

Swedenborg

Conjugal Love, 133...*both the higher and lower animals, land animals, birds of the air, reptiles, fish and insects are born knowing all that their loves require for their lives; for instance, everything they need to know about feeding, about where to live, how to copulate and produce young, and how to bring up their young. They established these facts by remarkable observations which they recalled to mind from what they had seen, heard and read in the natural world - as they called our world where they had previously lived - where the animals which exist are not representative but real. When they had fully proved the truth of this proposition, they turned their minds to seeking and finding the purposes and reasons which would explain and elucidate this question.*

The Critters' Choir



Rev. Wilma

"All God's critters got a place in the choir." I love the image of a choir coming together with all types of critters -- birds and fish and animals of every kind. Not all of them have hands to clap, so they clap their paws or whatever they have! I think of God's world consisting of so many different human beings, as well. This is Earth Day Month. I think

of all God's critters coming together from all corners of the earth to help create a world that is safer for all of us. Every critter responds to God call to restore The Creation. We human beings, too, are coming together in response to God's call. Like "the critters" we all have different ways that we can contribute to replenishing the environment. Every little action any of us can do makes a difference.

Let's look at some of the things that people of faith are doing to make a difference. The stories that follow are all true stories, from the web pages of the [National Council of Churches](#) eco-justice unit.



Massachusetts Council of Churches director Rev. Laura Everet's faith community helped her discern she didn't need her car anymore. Now, she rides a bike all over Boston. It has a spiffy Clergy license plate.



Trinity Episcopal Church, in Saco, Maine, honors the "Blessing of the Animals" on the first Sunday of October. On this day, about 25 animals were present: dogs and cats as well as a goat and a guinea pig!



Episcopal Church of Epiphany, Newport, New Hampshire
Last Year, the Episcopal Church of Epiphany in the small town of Newport, New

Hampshire started a vegetable garden. The garden grows zucchini, squash, carrots, eggplants, and a few other vegetables. This is the second spring that they have planted the garden. The garden is about 20' by 30.' The vegetables are given away to parishioners and neighbors, or even just people passing by on the street. As an educational component to their eco-justice actions, Episcopal Church of Epiphany also sponsored a Menu for the Future series on sustainable agriculture in the spring of 2011. The course was six weeks and was open to both church members and the community at large.



Kansas Church – Village Presbyterian

On Palm Sunday, Village Presbyterian Church gave away 1500 compact fluorescent bulbs. Rev. Tom Are preached about God's creation and the importance of taking small steps.

Village Presbyterian has taken several other steps to preserve creation. Its recycling initiative has recycled 427 tons of paper, and has averaged 4 tons a month over the last year. They have also started to buy recycled paper products in order to complete the cycle. They have held classes and put together a Creation Care Earth Fair, as well as celebrating Earth Day Sunday with a worship service focused on Creation. They have also dramatically improved the energy efficiency of all of the church building and switched to melamine dinnerware for church dinners.



Grace Episcopal Church in Kirkwood Missouri started an active Creation Care Ministry in June of 2009. Since then they have undertaken two major projects and several smaller ones. They have started a community garden that involves both church and community and retrofitted the building to save energy. The community garden is not only a great eco-justice project for the church, it also helps the poor in two ways. The church runs a program that brings inner city kids out to garden and learn about food. The food that is grown is then donated to the local food pantry.

In 2009, Grace Episcopal became the first church in Missouri to have an energy audit. The congregation then raised one million dollars for energy efficiency and got a

25-30 percent reduction in their annual energy costs.

Some of the other projects Grace has been involved with include recycling, canvass grocery bags, and eliminating styrofoam use from church functions. One of their more innovative projects is an eco-pilgrimage Sunday, in which congregants are encouraged to come to church using eco-friendly means like hiking or biking.

What is your reaction to these various projects that are being done to improve the environment? Do you have any stories to share about things that you or your faith community are doing for the environment? Let's collect our own stories to share here on the web, and with the National Council of Churches. You can share your stories in the discussion forum at the bottom of this web page.

Let us pray.



Dear God, who knows our thoughts and heartfelt dreams before we do, help us to stand for the regeneration of our planet however you will. Show us our tasks to create a better environment for us and future generations. Give us hearts of dedicated earth healers. We give thanks for the work you give us today and everyday. Thy will be done. AMEN"

Rev. Judith



Swedenborgian
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Heaven Emerging

May 4, 2013

Readings

From the Bible

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.^[a]

² I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

³ Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

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 observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

⁹ If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,

¹⁰ no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.

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

¹² they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

¹⁴ "Because he[[]

^{b]} loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.



¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation. ”

From Swedenborg:

234. Laws of Permission Are Also Laws of Divine Providence

There are no "laws of permission" that are simply that, or that are separate from the laws of divine providence. They are the same thing; so saying that God allows something to happen does not mean that he wants it to happen but that he cannot prevent it because of his goal, which is our salvation. Whatever happens for the sake of this goal, our salvation, is in accord with the laws of divine providence, since as already noted [183, 211], divine providence is always moving away from and contrary to our own intentions. It is constantly focused on its goal; so at every moment of its work, at every single step of its course, when it notices that we are straying from that goal it leads and turns and adapts us in accord with its laws, leading us away from evil and toward good. We will see shortly that this cannot be accomplished without allowing bad things to happen.

Message

Heaven Emerging

As we enter the final few months of this year's theme: "The Spiritual World," let's look more closely at how we bring heaven into our lives. More specifically, how do we change situations of "hell on earth" to opportunities for renewal and regeneration?

We certainly have many opportunities to observe this process around us. We have had numerous situations of violence, leaving innocent people dead or injured.

A recent example in the U.S. was the bombings at the Patriot's Day marathon in Boston.



[Photo by Ellen Webber for NPR](#)
Celeste Corcoran and her daughter Sydney

Celeste Corcoran is 47 years old. She was almost at the finish line of the Boston Marathon and waiting for her sister Carmen Accabo to catch up with her. When the first bomb went off, Celeste was thrown to the ground. The sound was so loud that both of her eardrums were blown out.

"I just remember looking down and seeing my legs," Corcoran remembers. "I really just saw blood and bone. My foot was off at an odd angle. I remember lying there and saying 'no' over and over. Like, 'No. No. This couldn't have happened. No.' "

Corcoran, who never lost consciousness through the ordeal, prepared for the worst as she lay on the bloody pavement, grit in her mouth, on her face and in her auburn hair.

"I thought I was going to die and I thought I wanted to die," she tells NPR. "I wanted to die because it hurt so bad. I thought, 'I can't take this. I hope I just die.' "

But that was just a fleeting thought.

"Because then almost immediately ... I think I shocked myself thinking 'I just want to die.' Then I was just sort of like, 'Seriously, I do not want to die. I've got so much to do. I've got my kids. I have my life. I have my husband.' There was no way I wanted to die."

Her husband, Kevin Corcoran, got to her and took off his belt for a tourniquet. She was frightened that she would lose her legs.

Kevin and Celeste thought that their 18-year-old daughter, Sydney, was with friends, away from the bombing site. However, Sydney was actually lying in the road near her mother but didn't know where either of her parents were. She saw a huge wound on her thigh with blood gushing out. She was in panic, but then became very tired.

"I was just so tired and I thought I was just going to bleed out," she recalls in a little-girl voice. "I felt like this was it. I was just going."

Mother and daughter ended up in the same hospital. Sydney's leg was fine after surgery, but her Mom had to have both of her legs amputated.

Their healing journey has already been long, and has much more to go.

"I knew I was going to live and I was very grateful for that," she says. "But I really was very discouraged about what my quality of life was going to be. I love going to the beach. That soothes me and really calms my spirit. And I remember lying here crying and thinking I wasn't going to be able to do that."

Fortunately, some real-life angels came into her life.

At that low point, a stranger walked into the Corcorans' hospital room — a U.S. Marine named Gabe Martinez. He's a veteran of Afghanistan who lost both legs from injuries very similar to Celeste's.

"He came in and said, 'You know, I was just like you. I was just like this. I felt helpless. I felt like I couldn't do anything for myself.' "

Martinez, who works with a group of amputees called the Semper Fi Fund that counsels severely injured servicemen, was the living proof Celeste needed that double amputees don't have to be dependent invalids.

He was "steady as a rock" on his prosthetic legs, she says. "And he's telling me I can be the exact same way."

This is an example of people taking experiences of "hell on earth" and making them into "heaven on earth. An important first step in turning tragedy into part of heaven is to understand that tragedy is never God's will.

We get a Swedenborgian perspective on dealing with tragedy from the book: *Why Does God Let It Happen?* by Bruce Henderson. This award-winning book incorporates many of the insights of the ground-breaking book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Henderson's book, however, is written from a Swedenborgian perspective.

In his introduction, Henderson gives us four concepts are fundamental to understanding Swedenborg's view of "God's will":

1. God is all-powerful and in total control. He never abandons us. But he does allow things that are contrary to his will, for the sake of our freedom, because our freedom is fundamental to his love.

2. What God allows but does not will is called "permission" by Swedenborg. Understanding this concept helps to answer the question, "Why?"

3. If the tragedy that happens in our lives is the permission, then providence is what happens afterward. It is the way God's love heals and it always leads to good.



4. What we see in this natural or material world is limited by space and time. It's temporal. God sees everything in a spiritual context—not only how our lives are affected here and now, but the impact and repercussions to eternity

He adds: *God's providence is governed by fixed spiritual laws. It is not arbitrary, but clear and consistent within a transcendent spiritual context.*

It is hard to understand why God allows tragedy. Henderson writes:

Without the freedom to make mistakes that may lead to suffering in our own lives and the lives of others, we would be reduced to automatons. The same principle works on a spiritual level. If God were to meddle in our lives and change the course of history to preserve our own narrow sense of order and justice, where would he stop? God cannot pick and choose. His laws—and his love—must be absolute and consistent.

Swedenborg sees the basic, minimal freedom of choice as absolute, irreducible, and unbridgeable. [Kirven, A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology, p. 9]

Understanding Swedenborg's concept of free will can help us cope with tragedy. Rabbi Kushner struggled with why his three-year-old son should die of a tragic disease. People tried to reassure him that "it was God's will." But the Rabbi found that to be an appalling theology. Henderson writes:

We can wonder, with Rabbi Kushner, why "the wrong people" get sick or hurt, or die young. We can agonize with him over the "deep, aching sense of unfairness" over his son's terminal disease. As people who are trying to do what is right in God's sight—living a religiously committed life—we would be tempted to ask the same question: If God truly is loving and fair, "How could he do this to me?" And not only how could he do this to "good parents," but how could he do this to an innocent, three-year-old child? ...

Rabbi Kushner has articulated the questions so well for so many people. He understands that God does not cause the bad things that happen to us, and that God does not sit on his throne, determining which of us will suffer misfortunes and which will be spared. But he does stand always ready to help, comfort, and lead. "The God I believe in," Kushner wrote, "does not send us the problem; he gives us the strength to cope with the problem."

So, what can we take from Swedenborg about the tragedies in life --personally or in our society? How do we make them part of our regeneration?

Celeste and Sydney are examples of regeneration in process. Although a bomb was set off by some people doing evil, far more people have transformed that evil. People

helped Celeste and Syndey on the road, and saved their lives. Countless medical personnel treated their wounds. People who lived with prosethic devises came to help them adjust to a new life.

Ultimately, the healing journey for all of us is through our loving actions and caring relationships

To Swedenborg, faith could not exist apart from the good deeds we do for others:

There cannot exist a grain of spiritual faith apart from charity, since charity is the life, soul, and essence of faith; 2. Such as the charity is, such is the faith; and the faith that precedes charity is a faith of cognitions, which is historical faith, in itself a knowing. [Charity, #198]

Swedenborg tells us that tragedy is never God's will. But we are not helpless victims in a world of random violence. Ultimately, the healing journey for all of us is through our loving actions and caring relationships. In this way, we continue to create heaven on earth; even in the midst of tremendous evil.

Let us pray:

"Oh,God, some days I feel like a zero when it comes to following your guidance. I falter when I see the whole task ahead. Yet, if I take only today's task, given to me through your will, it becomes one small act done with the heart's devotion. It is simple and easy. Let us develop the virtue of loving all we are and do. With gratitude we pray.
Amen"

Rev. Judith

Mother's Day: The Back Story

May 12, 2013

READINGS

Scripture

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

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3167. And to her mother. That this signifies for natural truth also (namely, that it thence has spiritual things, as is the case with natural good, concerning which see just above) is evident from the signification of "mother," as being the church, which is called "mother" from truth (see n. 289, 2717).

MOTHER'S DAY: THE BACK STORY



Rev. Wilma

This is a day to send flowers to Mom and to take her out to lunch, as we remember all the loving sacrifices Moms make every day. It's a day to grieve for Moms who have passed into the next world. These are important aspects of Mothers' Day.

But they are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding Mother's Day. Here's the back story:

During the Civil War Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." As she became more famous, she was frequently asked to speak publicly. She began to speak about the horrors of war, and became an advocate for peace.

She worked with the widows and orphans of soldiers on both sides of the war.

In 1870, she decided that peace and equality were the two most important things in the world. She called for women to rise up and oppose all forms of war.

She wanted to create a Mothers' Day for Peace, and published "A Mother's Day Proclamation" calling women to pacifism:

*Arise then...women of this day!
Arise, all women who have hearts! Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!
Say firmly...
"Disarm! Disarm!
The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."
Blood does not wipe our dishonor,
Nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil
At the summons of war,
Let women now leave all that may be left of home
For a great and earnest day of counsel.
Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.
Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means
Whereby the great human family can live in peace...
Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, But of God -*

Howe was an inspiration to Anna Reeves Jarvis, a social activist and community organizer in Appalachia. In 1858, she organized poor women in West Virginia into "Mothers' Work Day Clubs" to raise the issue of clean water and sanitation. She also worked for universal access to medicine for the poor. She was also a pacifist who served both sides in the Civil War by working for camp sanitation and medical care for soldiers of the North and the South.

She read Swedenborg's Divine Love and Wisdom. [Poole, p. 105]

After Anna Reeves Jarvis died in 1905, her daughter Anna Jarvis continued her work to make Mother's Day a national holiday. In May 1907, Anna passed out 500 white carnations in her Methodist church to commemorate the life of her mother who had been active in that congregation. The next year, that Methodist church created a special service to honor all mothers. Many progressive and liberal Christian organizations--like the YMCA and the World Sunday School Association- supported the cause and worked to make Mother's Day a national holiday. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed Mother's Day into law. The rest is history!

However, Anna Jarvis was distraught with the commercialization of Mother's Day. She launched numerous lawsuits against for-profit groups using the name Mother's Day, and eventually spent much of her inheritance on legal fees.

In 1925, when an organization called the American War Mothers used Mother's Day as

an occasion for fundraising and selling carnations, Jarvis crashed their convention in Philadelphia and was arrested for disturbing the peace. By the 1940s, Jarvis had disowned the holiday altogether, and lobbied the congress to see it removed from the calendar. Her efforts were to no avail, however, and Jarvis died destitute in 1948 in Philadelphia's Marshall Square Sanitarium.

Diana Butler Bass, writing in the Huffington Post, says: *Although I've never seen it on a pastel flowered greeting card, Mother's Day honors a progressive feminist, inclusive, non-violent vision for world community--born in the imagination of women who devoted themselves to God, not Caesar.*

At times Mother's Day has also been a date for advocating for progressive causes. In 1968 Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King Jr., used Mother's Day to host a march in support of underprivileged women and children. In the 1970s women's groups also used the holiday as a time to highlight the need for equal rights and access to childcare.

So, Mother's Day is about justice. Let's consider some of the mothers who deserve special recognition on this day of justice. This week we have been celebrating the release of three women kidnapped and held captive for ten years. The mothers of the victims spent years not knowing what had happened to their daughters. The mother of Amanda Berry had a heart attack and passed away during that time. Amanda herself deserves very special recognition: she became a mother while held captive. I can't imagine a more challenging path for becoming a mother: being raped, then giving birth, and raising a daughter while both are held captive.

Yet, is there a lack of justice in the news stories of this week on the Cleveland kidnapping victims as well as the trials Amanda Knox, and Jodi Arias? Lisa Bloom, an attorney, writes for CNN Opinion:

- Our country is obsessed with the perils of attractive young white women, as this week's trio of high profile crime stories about Amanda Knox, Jodi Arias and the Cleveland kidnapping victims demonstrates. We don't see breathless coverage of the disproportionately large number of African-American men tried for crimes in our system. We see almost no coverage of missing boys, or missing children of color, or crimes against nonwhites.

This week an African-American man in Mississippi, Willie Manning, was about to be executed, though he was denied access to DNA testing. Manning, convicted of murdering two college students in 1994, maintains his innocence and requested the scientific testing, which has exonerated many convicted murderers, including some on death row.

She points out that the Mississippi Supreme Court ruled that the execution should go ahead, but it was delayed with an outpouring of letters from the U.S Justice department. The stories of Arias and Knox are important, and deserve to be

covered. But to the exclusion of a story that raises questions about the death penalty for an African-American man who cannot get DNA testing to prove his innocence?

It is fortunate that the three Cleveland women are having their stories covered, which are raising awareness about other missing children. However, Bloom points out, as have many of the stories on TV this week, that white children's abduction are given press and police attention far beyond that given to children of color.

Bloom writes:

And the biggest American crime story of all receives the least mention: that we now incarcerate more of our own people than any other country on earth, or in human history, and that minority males are disproportionately policed, arrested and convicted, and sentenced to harsher sentences. African-American juveniles are six times as likely as whites to be sentenced to prison for identical crimes.

I was absolutely stunned to read this:

In sheer numbers, more African-Americans are under correctional control today than were enslaved at the time of the Civil War.

How can this be? We fought a Civil War to free African Americans from slavery. Yet now, society enslaves them in a different way through our penal system. Where is the justice in this situation? Every African-American prisoner has a mother. Many of them ARE mothers.

Bloom ends her article with: *We cannot call ourselves a nation of equals until we pay equal attention to all those in our criminal justice system whose stories merit our attention, regardless of their race or gender.*

To Swedenborg, the Lord *is* justice. He wrote:

Because of its nature and origin, and because in and of itself it is purely divine, the Lord's justice could not become part of anyone or produce any salvation any more than the divine life could, which is divine love and divine wisdom. The Lord does come into every one of us bring his love and divine wisdom, but unless we are following the divine design in our lives, that life, although it may indeed be in us, makes no contribution whatever to our salvation. It gives us only the ability to understand what is true and do what is good. TC 96

This is a day to take Mom out to lunch and thank her for all that she has done for her family. Also take time today to consider what justice issues are around us that all mothers and their children need to address.

Let us pray.



"Our beloved Lord, who has all knowledge and understanding in every situation, help us to have the willingness to pray for all those touched by abuse. Lift the nightmare in our consciousness, and give us the fortitude to pray without ceasing, the compassion to forgive, the openness to Love, and the will to change ourselves.

Let us be at peace in your comforting arms. Thank you, God. Amen.

Love,
Rev. Judith



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

The Mystery of Emerald Lake

May 19, 2013

READINGS

BIBLE:

Matthew 5 (New International Version)

Matthew 5

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.

The Mystery of Emerald Lake



Rev. Wilma

Emerald Lake in East Dorset, VT, shimmers and glimmers in the summer sun, as two communities co-exist there. Wealthy people from CT and NY come to spend the summer in their cottages, while poorer town folks visit the lake after work and on weekends.

One of the wealthy New York visitors of the early 1900's was Dr. Clark Burnham. He had been born in Lancaster, PA, to a family of ten children. His father, Nathan, was a doctor and a lawyer, as well as a minister in the Swedenborgian Church.

Lois's mother had been raised as a Congregationalist, and Lois attended Quaker schools. Lois's family attended the Swedenborgian Church in New York. On Sundays, they often invited the minister and some of the congregants' home to lunch.

As life became increasingly busy, Dr. Burnham decided to purchase a cottage at Emerald Lake. Lois loved her summers there. There were other Swedenborgian families who summered there, including the Seekamp's. They named their young daughter "Lois" after Lois Burnham. That Lois grew up to marry George Dole and they now live in Bath, ME.

It was at Emerald Lake cabin in May of 1914 that young Lois answered to door to see one of the young "natives" selling kerosene lanterns. She knew that the young man was a friend of her brother's, but had never met him. His name was Bill Wilson. He was four years younger than Lois, and in a different social class. He was not a likely suitor for Lois. She had, in fact, recently started dating a young man named Norman Schneider. He was a Swedenborgian from Kitchener, Ontario, and she had met him at a church convention. Her parents were quite taken with Norman and had invited him to spend a

week with them at their cottage. Lois like him, but was not drawn to him the way her parents were. After he left, Rogers persuaded his sister to join some friends at a dance in town. She reluctantly agreed, only to find that waiting at the dance was Bill Wilson!

They danced together, and a courtship was begun. Bill was in college, and Lois – having graduated college – was working. They didn't see much of each other until the following summer at the lake. Norman proposed to Lois, and she turned him down. Then Bill proposed, and she accepted. They kept it a secret for a while, knowing that her parents would be disappointed. Her parents did, however, reluctantly accept her choice.

They put on a grand wedding in the New York Swedenborgian Church on Jan. 24, 1918. Bill was in the army and they wanted to get married before he was shipped to France. It was a beautiful wedding. However, Dr. Burnham was concerned to see his new son in law at the reception guzzle down a glass of scotch. Lois had become concerned about Bill's drinking, but felt certain that once married he would stop.

While her new husband was overseas, Lois worked with the YWCA and applied for a program that sent women overseas to help tend the wounded. She was shocked that the YW turned her down, as they felt that Swedenborgians and Unitarians were not Christians!

After the war, Bill and Lois continued to attend church there, although it seems that Lois was more active as a member. Their married life deteriorated as Bill's drinking grew worse. He tried many times to stop drinking, but kept returning. He finally stopped when, in detox, he reached total despair, and called out, "If there be a God, let him show himself!" He saw the room bathed in white light, and knew that God was with him. He never drank again. A friend dropped off a copy of a new book, "Varieties of Religious Experience" by psychologist William James [who had been raised as a Swedenborgian.] Bill's friend Ebby, also alcoholic, went to Switzerland to work with Dr. Jung, who told him that sobriety required a religious experience.

There were many ways that Swedenborgian influences were with Bill as he became sober: the religion of his wife and her family; the book by William James, and Ebby's words from Dr. Jung. When the twelve steps were developed, Bill and Lois said it was primarily the 6 principles of the Oxford Group that influenced them. But through the years, many Swedenborgians have found a profound similarity between the 12 steps and Swedenborg's regeneration.

Rev. Jim Lawrence wrote to Lois [Burnham] Wilson in 1987 asking whether her Swedenborgian roots had influenced the development of the 12 steps. She wrote back: "I don't believe being a Swedenborgian had a direct influence, but it did much to make me ready for the message of the 12 steps which based on the 6 principles of the Oxford Group." One of the New Church ministers [I think it was Grant Schnarr] also wrote with a similar question and got back a similar answer, with her adding that even if it were true, she wouldn't tell anyone because of the importance of AA being separate from any



religion.

Grant Schnarr's book: Spiritual Recovery, a 12 Step Guide, uses the 12 steps to facilitate our spiritual growth. He says: "The similarities found between Swedenborg's teachings about spirituality, and those found in the twelve-step philosophy are astounding." [Page x] It will Bill's recovery, and his relationship with Dr. Bob, that established AA. Lois became the primary force behind the development of Al-Anon for friends of family of alcoholics.

In their later years, Bill and Lois lived at Stepping Stone in Katonah, NY. Lois died in 1988. Here is a list of some of the books that were in her library by Swedenborg:

*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine
The Principia
Angelic Wisdom Concerning The Divine Love and the Divine Wisdom
The Four Doctrines*

Emerald Lake was a mysterious place, where connections were made among Swedenborgians and their friends that helped in the founding of AA and Al-anon. In many direct and indirect ways, people found guidance through the work of Emanuel Swedenborg that led to regeneration in their lives.

How did one vacation spot became a place where so many people's lives were woven together in ways that changed history and helped countless human beings? It has something to do with God being at work in our every day lives.

How is God at work in your everyday life? Are there ways that books or people with Swedenborgian connections have facilitated regeneration in your life?

Let us pray.



"Our Lord, thank you for the loving care you have given us each day, the ability to take steps to change for the good, and the power you give to us as we do your will in our lives. When we pray for others, help us to ask for Your Heart's Desire for them and their lives. When we pray for ourselves, help us to pray for your will, and the delight that comes from following that will. Thank you for the joy of today. AMEN.

Rev. Judith

The Mystery in the White City, Pt. 1

May 26, 2013

READINGS

BIBLE:

Scripture: Mark 11: 23-26

23For 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.

24Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

25And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

26But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

SWEDENBORG

4054. 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.

**The Mystery in the White City
Part 1**



by Rev. Wilma

It was May of 1893, and two cousins were having very different life experiences.

LOIS BURNHAM WILSON

Lois Burnham was a two year old, living in wealthy section of Brooklyn Heights in New York City. She was a first child of an up and coming young physician; Clark Burnham, and his wife Matilda. Dr. Clark Burnham was a devout Swedenborgian who took his

family every Sunday to the New York Swedenborgian Church. Lois' grandfather, Nathan Clark Burnham, was a Swedenborgian minister in PA.

Lois was having a loving and full childhood experience. In just a few years, she would be one of the first U.S. kids to attend a new type of school called "kindergarten," a progressive concept from Germany. She would be almost nine years old when her father had sufficient wealth and leisure to purchase a cottage on Emerald Lake in Vermont. Dr. Burnham took his family there every summer.

In the summer of 1914, Lois would be introduced to a friend of her brother, Rogers. This young man was a local at Emerald Lake, and rather poor. He was working his way through Norwich University. His name was Bill Wilson. He and Lois would fall in love, but have a tumultuous marriage as Bill's alcoholism spiraled out of control. Eventually, Bill would help to found A.A., and Lois would be a co-founder of Al-Anon. Their story is told in last week's message; [The Mystery at Emerald Lake](#).

DANIEL BURNHAM

May of 1893 was a crucial time for Lois' older cousin, Daniel. Daniel Burnham was a 47-year-old architect, living in Chicago. His father was the older brother of Nathan Clark Burnham [Lois Burnham Wilson's father]. Lois and Daniel were first cousins, grandchildren of Rev. Nathan Clark Burnham. [See the genealogy in graphic at the end of the page, or by clicking here on "[Burnham Family Tree](#)" for a pdf version.]

Daniel's family had moved to Chicago when he 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.

Daniel had fallen in love with a lovely young woman whose father, Holland Weeks, was a Congregational minister. However, Rev. Weeks found himself increasingly drawn to the Swedenborgians, and ended up starting a society of the Church of the New Jerusalem in Henderson, N.Y., in 1825.



Like his cousin Lois, Daniel was raised as a Swedenborgian. He had become a successful architect, and was commissioned to be the Director of Works for the Columbian Exposition; The Chicago World's Fair. It opened on May 1st, and people gasped in amazement at 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, in matching white, and they all served useful purposes. The water was clean; the food was plentiful.

It was called "The White City" after the color of the buildings. The White City 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. It mad Daniel Burnham into a world-famous architect.

About 15 years later, Burnham was commissioned to develop a plan for Chicago. He put together a breath-taking vision of a city that was for the use of its citizens. He presented his plan in 1909, and much of the plan was put into effect after his death in 1912.

Burnham said that his plan for Chicago 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 Most of the work he did for cities was done without a fee.

One researcher on Daniel Burnham's, 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. This is part of what he wrote, that was eliminated:

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.

Burnham never did well in school, and he flunked college entrance exams. Yet, he 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. He found his deepest passion in life, and he followed it.

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.

THE WHITE CITY

“The White City; the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, was a mysterious event that has changed the world. People's lives were woven together in ways that only God can understand.

Daniel Burnham's role in the fair changed Chicago and architecture forever. He led to his being commissioned to develop the Plan of Chicago years later.

The fair was also a time that serial killer, H.H.Holmes, found victims for his horrible crimes. Next week, we'll look at the non-fiction book, “Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America” by Erik Larson. It contrasts Daniel Burnham's brilliant experience in the Columbian Exposition with the evil deeds of H.H. Holmes. It is a detailed historical account that reads like a novel. We'll contrast the intertwining of evil and good at this monumental world event, and look at God's role.

Another aspect of the 1893 fair was The Parliament of World Religions. It was the first attempt to bring together all of the world's religions, and it was instrumental in starting the interfaith movement in the U.S. Its designer was Chicago Swedenborgian Charles Bonney. We'll look at his story on June 9th.

Daniel Burnham took the concepts of Swedenborg and used them to develop architectural design. For Lois Burnham, Swedenborg was her childhood grounding, out of which she came to terms with Bill's alcoholism and helped to found Al-Anon. Swedenborg's view of spiritual growth is intertwined in today's world in many ways. How do you see the basic ideas of regeneration – rebirth, renewal – at work in your life today?

Let us pray.



"Lord, we come to you in loving gratitude for all you bless us with each day. We need to learn to be more open to others in our lives. Help us to stand with those in suffering and pain, not shut them out. Help us to show our love for each other in simple acts of kindness. Let us say the simple prayer of "Bless them. Change me." when we resist or criticize. Let us be living examples of Your Love, and Grace to all. AMEN."

Rev. Judith

Mystery in White City, Pt. 2: Magic and Murder

June 2, 2013

READINGS

BIBLE:

Scripture: Matthew 5

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,[a] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister[b][c] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’[d] is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

SWEDENBORG

Divine Providence

175. It Is a Law of Divine Providence That a Person Not Perceive or Sense Anything of the Operation of Divine Providence, but Still Know about And Acknowledge it.

The Mystery in the White City Part 1



by Rev. Wilma

Swedenborg tells us that space and time do not exist.

It seems possible, then, that there could be time travel. Well, maybe we'll never see it on the earthly plane. But I like to imagine that time travel is possible, and that I could visits events of

the past.

Where would you visit if you could time travel? At the very top of my list would be the 1893 Chicago World's fair. Although I grew up near Chicago, that fair was never anything I heard much about. However, once I became a Swedenborgian and learned more about our church history, I became fascinated with it. Why? I think because of the magic, including:

THE MAGIC

SWEDENBORGIANS

This fair was largely planned and developed by Swedenborgian architect Daniel Burnham. It was an opportunity for famous painters of the time to display their art, including Swedenborgian George Inness. One of the exhibits at the fair was for a machine that could write Braille. Young Helen Keller was a visitor at that exhibit.

The last weeks of the fair were devoted to a Parliament of World Religions, planned by Swedenborgian Charles Bonney.

VISITORS TO THE FAIR

Visitors at the fair include Theodore Dreiser, Helen Keller, Houdini, Tesla, Edison, Joplin, Darrow, a Princeton professor named Woodrow Wilson, Teddy Roosevelt, Lillian Russell, and an elderly lady named Susan B. Anthony.

One day as the Board of Lady Managers debated whether to support running the fair Sunday; an angry male confronted Susan B. Anthony and asked if she'd prefer having a son of hers attend Buffalo Bill's show on Sunday instead of church. Yes, she replied, "he would learn far more..."

GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS:

In so many ways, this fair was the door-way into the Twentieth Century. The U.S. wanted to host a World's Fair in 1892 to honor the 400th anniversary of the Columbus discovering America. Chicago, striving to overcome its association with stockyards and the great fire, put its heart into getting the commission over New York. They wanted to show how much the U.S. had achieved since 1492. Achievements at the fair included:

Westinghouse provided the first large demonstration of alternation current to illuminate the fair grounds.

A guy named "Ferris" invented a huge wheel of steel cars to let people ride up high, round and round.

Foods introduced at the fair included: cracker jacks, cream of wheat, Hershey's chocolate, Juicy Fruit gum, Aunt Jemima's pancake mix, shredded wheat, and Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer named for the award it won.

Many people experienced the fair as a place of magic. However, some fair goers experienced the horror of murder.

However, there were things going on in and around the fair that I would not want to visit.

MURDER

Erik Larsen's book: *The Devil in the White City: A Saga of Magic and Murder at the Fair that Changed America* gives extensive detail about Burnham and the fair. It also tells the story of Herman Webster Mudgett (May 16, 1861 – May 7, 1896), better known under the alias of Dr. Henry Howard Holmes. Holmes's lived at the same time as Jack the Ripper, and may have been inspired by him. He was one of the first known serial killers in the U.S.

He lived in a number of places and lived by perpetrating various frauds; especially involving insurance companies. It's unclear when he began to kill, but it seemed to be part of his life by the time he moved to Chicago in 1886. He had a medical degree, and he purchased a pharmacy, which served as a cover for several women who went missing from his life. He learned that the Chicago World's Fair would be opening near-by, so he managed to purchase property and build a three-story building. The ground floor was his pharmacy, the middle one had rooms to rent to fair-goers, and on the top floor he built sound-proof rooms, from which screams could not be heard.

Many young women around the country left their small home towns to experience the excitement of Chicago during the World's Fair. Some of them were never heard from again. Some of those women encountered HH. Holmes.

After the fair, Holmes moved on as police were becoming suspicious of him. A gutsy detective in was assigned to investigate the disappearance of three children, and he came across Holmes. Through painstaking detective work, he tracked down Holmes as the murderer and warned Chicago police to investigate his activities there more closely. Soon, many remains were found buried in his large house; which mysteriously burned to the ground as soon as the police began to investigate it.

While he confessed to 27 murders, of which four were confirmed, he could have murdered as many as 200. He took an unknown number of his victims from the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, which was less than two miles away, to his "World's Fair" hotel.

The case was notorious in its time and received wide publicity through a series of articles in newspapers. Interest in Holmes' was revived in 2003 by Erik Larson's *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America*, a best-selling non-fiction book that juxtaposed an account of the planning and staging of the World's Fair with Holmes' story. His story had been previously chronicled in *The Torture Doctor* by David Franke (1975), *Depraved: The Shocking True Story of America's First Serial Killer* by Harold Schechter (1994), and chapter VI "The Monster of Sixty-Third Street" of *Gem of the Prairie: An Informal History of the Chicago Underworld* by Herbert Asbury (1940, republished 1986).



GOD

The fair was an extraordinary contrast of the best of our culture; and the worst of human depravity. Larsen's book give a stark reality to both by alternating chapters.

Of course, good and evil are rarely so clear-cut. In this case, we can find levels of evil intertwined with the brilliance of the fair. Many workers were killed in the building of the fair, through inadequate safety precautions and being pushed to their brink. There was a strong struggle for unionization, and Burnham and the fair officials resisted it as long as they could. References to the "White City" clear and pure with Chicago, the "Black City" has suggestions of racism. The process of putting the fair together was filled with egotism, politics, jealousy, and capitalism.

Larsen's book gives us a unique opportunity to see how God works through the good, the evils, and everything in between.

Bruce Henderson, in his book, *Why Does God Let It Happen*, points out that people have debated whether there was a Divine presence that planned each event of life; or whether natural laws were the will of Providence. Henderson reminds us again of Swedenborg's view that God does permit what he does not will for the sake of our freedom. [P. 24].

God allows evil to exist so that we can have free will. We have to live between heaven and hell in order to have the free choice that makes us human.

We have to be free to act from our own will, as long as we can make rational choices. We cannot be in a process of regeneration if we live with "fear, disease, insanity, or ignorance." That means that in cases of a mental illness that impairs rational thinking, one is not making free choices. If we don't know all of the facts or we are afraid to make our own choice, then we are not free to choose.

We cannot be required to believe in God; that takes away our freedom. God will never force us to make certain choices or believe in a certain way.

We have to be able to recognize evil in the world in order to be able to reject it. We have to be able to see the consequences of good and of evil choices in our lives

We can't see the specifics of how Divine Providence is working in our lives. If we know how God was at work in our lives, we might resent the direction God has in mind for us and rebel. Or we might choose that direction to be obedient, but not out of our worked it out in free will.

How do see God at work in the great times and tragic times of your life?

Let us pray.



“ Holy Lord, Mother/Father God, help us to hold fast to the beliefs that we have in life that produce good works in this world. Help us to believe in your constant presence,your love for us, and in the great abundance and prosperity of your world which we shall receive if only we will believe it can happen. Help us to declare prosperity in all of our lives. Help us to focus and do with one pointedness all that is good, knowing that you are always with us showing the way. We are filled with gratitude for your loving presence each day of our lives. Amen.”

Love and Blessings, Rev. Judith

Interfaith Movement & Swedenborgians

June 9, 2013

READINGS

BIBLE:

Scripture:

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.

SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3063 3063. And do mercy. That this signifies an influx of love is evident from the essence of mercy, as being love. Love is itself turned to mercy and becomes mercy when anyone who is in need of help is regarded from love or charity; hence mercy is the effect of love toward the needy and miserable. But here by "mercy" in the internal sense is meant love; and by "doing mercy" is meant an influx of love, because it is from the Lord's Divine Itself into His Divine Human; for it was the Lord's Divine love through which He made His Human Divine; for love is the very being of life, and no one has Divine love but the Lord.

The Interfaith Movement: Swedenborgians at the Fair



by Rev. Wilma

Last week, I said that I wished I could ride a time machine back to Chicago in 1893 to experience the Chicago World's Fair. I talked last week about some of the prominent Swedenborgians connected with the fair – especially architect Daniel Burnham.

That is just the beginning of the story of the role of Swedenborgians at the fair, and the

impact they had on the world.

On February 24, 1890, Chicago received the electrifying news that their city was selected – over New York – to host the 1892 World’s Fair. [Which was delayed until 1893.]

Even before then, a flurry of plans and proposals had proliferated through the city. One enthusiastic proposal was different from all the others. It was put forth by Swedenborgian lawyer Charles C. Bonney. He wrote:

“The crowning glory of the 1892 World’s Fair should not be the exhibits then to be made of material triumphs, industrial achievements and mechanical victories of man, however magnificent that display may be. Something higher and nobler is demanded by the enlightened spirit of the present age.

"Statesmen, jurists, financiers, scientists, literati, teachers, and theologians" would meet in conjunction with the proposed world's fair to discuss everything from religion to international law to "the practicability of a common language."

Bonney advocated that the fair be more than just the exhibits; it would also have “congresses” or “parliaments” – including anthropology, labor, medicine, commerce and finance, literature, history, art, philosophy, and science. And religion. He was put in charge of all of the world congresses. He was especially committed to the Parliament of world Religions. He said its purpose was:

"To unite all religion against all irreligion; to make the Golden Rule the basis of this union; to present to the world in the Religious Congresses, to be held in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the Religious Life; to provide for a World's Parliament of Religions, in which their common aims and common grounds of union may be set forth, and the marvelous Religious Progress of the Nineteenth Century be reviewed; and to facilitate separate and Independent Congresses of different Religious Denominations and Organizations, under their own officers, in which their business may be transacted, their achievements presented, and their work for the future considered."

This was the first time in history that an attempt had been made to bring together religions of the world in “absolute respect” for each other. [See George Dole’s [With Absolute Respect: The Swedenborgian Theology of Charles Carroll Bonney \(Swedenborg Studies\)](#)]

Just who was this Charles Bonney

Charles C. Bonney was born in Hamilton, New York on September 4, 1831. He attended Colgate University, and got a law degree. He taught for a while, and then moved to Peoria, IL where he founded a school. In 1852, he became a lecturer in education at Peoria College, and he played an important role in setting up the Illinois

state school system.

While living in Peoria, he attended a New Church service. He was impressed, and continued to attend while reading the works of Swedenborg. The theology confirmed his own conviction that the religions of the world should all be respected and honored. He wrote:

“In this church I was taught the fundamental truths which made a Parliament of World Religions possible, upon which rested the whole plan of the religious congresses of 1893, and which guided the execution of that plan to a success so great and far-reaching that only the coming generations can fully comprehend and estimate its influence. ... [*Genesis* by Bonney]

Bonney moved to Chicago in 1860. In 1866, he became a judge of the Supreme Court of Illinois. Bonney was president of the Illinois State Bar Association in 1882. He was also active in the American Bar Association, serving as Vice President in 1887, and became a candidate for the Supreme Court of the United States.

He is especially remembered for his role in establishing the first [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), at the [World's Columbian Exposition](#) of 1893, where over 200 "World's Congresses" or "World's Parliaments" were held. Bonney was president and oversaw all of them.

The Parliament, which ran from September 11 to the 27th. Today it is recognized as the birth of the interfaith movement.

Bonney published several books in his lifetime, including *Handbook of the Law of Railway Carriers*, *Summary of the Law of Insurance*, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, and *The World's Congress Addresses*.

Bonney became ill in 1900, and died of paralysis on August 23, 1903 in Chicago.

In addition to the large Parliament of World Religions, there were smaller congresses for various religious faiths and denominations. There was a meeting of the Church of the New Jerusalem. One delegate was Sarah Hibbard, daughter of Richard De Charms. *New Church Life* in 1893 quoted the start of her remarks:

We are assembled here as an integral part of this Congress of Religions. From all parts of the world, representatives of creeds, both ancient and modern, have come together to exchange thoughts on the various ideas concerning God, and the relation of His creatures to Him. The papers which will be presented will draw their inspiration from the source of Divine Truth as it may appear to each writer, whether he be Hindoo, or Chinese, Mahometan or Christian. Our thoughts as expressed must likewise be drawn from the source of our religious inspiration. .

Another Swedenborgian delegate was Ellen Spencer Mussey.

She practiced law before women could be lawyers. She was active in suffrage before

women could vote.

Ellen was out of step with society most of her life. She lived from 1850 to 1936. Her parents died young, and she went to D.C. to live with her brother Henry and sister-in-law Sarah Andrews Spencer, who was an active and well-known suffragist. After moving to D.C., Ellen happened to meet General Reuben Delavan Massey, Superintendent of the Sunday school at our DC Swedenborgian Church. She, too, became a Sunday school teacher, helping to teach Massey's children. Massey's wife died, and he married Ellen in 1871.

The Massey's became well-known in the social circles of Washington. They knew personally many Presidents. They developed a law practice together, but Ellen was not allowed to enter law school. Why? She was a woman. There were no women lawyers at that time.

Not to be deterred, she studied law on her own, and joined her husband in a joint law practice. General Massey died in 1892, and Ellen now needed to practice law on her own. She easily passed the bar exam in Washington, and was admitted to the bar in 1893. That same year, she was appointed to be a Swedenborgian delegate to the Parliament of World Religions.

Ellen's talk at the Parliament specifically addressed women:

Dear Sisters,

Let us fit ourselves and our daughters for a life of active use. Let us not be led astray by personal ambition or love of ease. Let us remember that every soul is accountable to God, and that we must form our opinions, even though they differ from those we love best. Let us not be disputatious, but rather help our brothers to see that when they shut themselves away from the womanly influence, they are in fact closing the higher or celestial plane of their minds, and so preventing the doctrines of the church from passing into life.

There was also a women's congress at the World's Fair. Through the efforts of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a Board of Lady Managers had been established for the fair. They established a congress of women to take place alongside the fair. Many thousands of women – and many men – were there to attend those meetings.

In Susan Poole's book, *Lost Legacy: Inspiring Women of Nineteenth Century America*, she quotes Mussy's description of that conference:

Even women's suffrage, so frowned upon that it had been given one session, was arousing so much interest that extra meetings had to be held, and its valiant leader, Miss Anthony, once so ridiculed and defamed, became the veritable luminary of the women's congress. When she talked, crowds stormed the meetings, and when she appeared at other meetings, the crowd broke into the discourse of the speaker on the platform to do Miss Anthony honors.

Ellen came to see how essential organization was for the advancement of women. She returned to DC and became active in the women's movement.

Her law practice flourished, and she took on controversial cases. She campaigned to change laws that discriminated against women.

What an inspiring experience it must have been to have been present at that Parliament of World Religions! The official web site for the council says:

“The 1893 Parliament marked the first formal gathering of representatives of eastern and western spiritual traditions. Today it is recognized as the birth of formal interreligious dialogue worldwide.”

One of the most notable participants was Swami Vivekananda, who introduced Hinduism to the world, and, in many ways, launched steps towards the New Age Movement.

There have been many Parliaments of World Religions held since then, around the world. The next one will probably be in 2014, with a location announced this summer.

These cultural and religious advances came about because of the many people who were willing to speak up, and speak out. They have made a difference in our world by expressing their true selves. How do you express who you are in the world? Can you see ways that you impact our world for good by expressing yourself?

Let us pray.



Dearest Lord dwelling in the center of all beings, let us Be the most loving of servants. Encourage us to live in Love and Charity each day. Taking your word into the center of our hearts and living through it. Keep us ever mindful of all you would have us be, only our highest and best in the service of others. When we are weary and losing hope, encourage us with your Love and Truth. Remind us that we are never alone for you are ever with us in all that we do. Let us know Joy, and laughter even in the midst of trial and difficulty. Thank you Lord for your wisdom and grace. Bless us this day with your Holy Fire. Amen

New Church Birthday Party

June 16, 2013

Readings

From the Bible:

" 9- *And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he proposed in Christ, 10- to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment.....to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*" "10- *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* " *Ephesians 1:9,10, 2:10. (NIV)*

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

New Church Birthday Party!!

[A message that received a lot of interest and appreciation was "Happy Birthday, New Church" in 2010. This is a slightly modified version of that message; to also honor Father's Day.]



Tom arrived at the neighborhood cafe a few minutes before his friend, Pete, so began perusing the menu. Pete arrived breathless a few moments later.

"Sorry I'm late! The traffic was brutal. What's the special today?"

Tom and Pete had been boyhood friends through grammar and high school. Their careers and family lives took different paths, but they remained close. Once a month, they met for Saturday afternoon lunch to catch up on their lives.

"I don't have a lot of time," Pete said. "I have to get home and mow the lawn for tomorrow's BBQ for Father's Day. The kids will all be coming back for the day!"

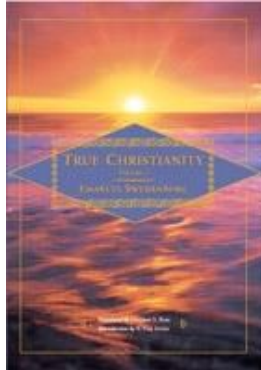
Tom smiled. "Even Kim at school in New York?" Pete nodded. "Hey, Dude -- congrats! We'll be doing something in the evening for Father's Day tomorrow. We'll be staying late at church for a celebration."

"Yeah? What are you celebrating?" Pete asked.

"New Church Day."

"What's that?"

"Well, it's a celebration of the birthday of our church: June 19, 1770."



"Really? I didn't know your church had a specific start day. I'd love to hear that story."

Sandwiches arrived, and the men dug in.

"OK," Tom began between bites. "Here's the story. 1770 was late in Swedenborg's life; he died in 1772. He had just finished writing his 2-volume True Christianity. He was told that the Second Coming happened in heaven that day."

"Oh, come on! 2nd Coming! I know my church is pretty fundamentalist from your perspective. We have really clear doctrine on the 2nd Coming. Jesus will come back to earth and there will be a final judgment with the believers going the heaven. Others will be left behind – like in those books."

"Well, that is the traditional Christian approach, of course; Swedenborg was quite adamant that it was wrong."

Tom pulled out his Kindle, on which had all of the books of Swedenborg's writing. Pete was impressed. "Hey, a Kindle! I'm hoping my kids are giving me a Kindle Fire tomorrow!"



The prevailing opinion in the churches at the present day is, that when the Lord shall come for the last judgment, He will appear in the clouds of heaven with angels and the sound of trumpets;

will gather together all who still dwell on the earth, together with all who have died; will separate the wicked from the good, as a shepherd separates the goats from the sheep; will then cast the wicked or the goats into hell, and will raise the good or the sheep into heaven; and at the same time will create a new visible heaven and a new habitable earth, and will send down upon that earth the city called the New Jerusalem; ...also that into that city will be gathered all the elect, both those who are still alive and those who have died since the beginning of the world; that these will then return into their bodies, and in that magnificent city, as their heaven, will enjoy eternal blessedness. This is the prevailing opinion in the Christian churches of today respecting the Lord's coming and the last judgment. {True Christian Religion, #768}

"Yeah, that's pretty much what we believe," Pete mused.

"After Swedenborg finished True Christian Religion, he was told that Jesus was sending out the disciples. Jesus was coming into everyone's heart and now is inside for all of us."

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. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord:

He shall send his angels and they shall gather together his elect, from the end of the heavens to the end thereof (Matt. 24:31).

"That doesn't make sense!" Pete exclaimed. "The 2nd Coming is about separating the true Christians from all others. It can't happen till when the Final Judgment comes."

"See, Swedenborg separates the Final Judgment from the Second Coming. The final judgment was in 1757. It's actually a final judgement about the church: the old church is passing away, as a New Church emerges. We also all have our own judgments inside of ourselves throughout our lives. Ultimately, we judge ourselves in the next world; not God.

Then June 19, 1770 was the Second Coming. Here listen to this" Tom found another quote on his kindle.

TCR 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

...

"Swedenborg says it's not about being Christian in the traditional sense – or any particular religion – it's about living with this love inside of us. It was the start of a whole new concept of church – a way of living



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together that was about doing good; not about what one believed. All of those who strive to live with love, regardless of belief, are part of a new concept of church – a 'New Church.'

"Oh. So that's why you folks call yourselves the 'New Church'. I thought 'New Church' was just another church."

"Oh, no," that's not what Swedenborg meant. It's sort of post-church. It's beyond the concept of there being different religions. It's people living together based on loving action; not separating themselves by what they believe."

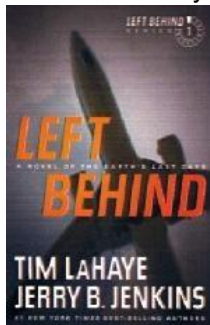
"So Swedenborg said this New Church started on June 19?"

"Yes; it started in heaven. We have a long way to go on earth. But it's part of his concept of the New Jerusalem; heaven on earth; where people are united by how they live; not what they believe."

790. *What this church is to be is fully described in Revelation, where the end of the former church and the beginning of the new are treated of. This new church is described by the new Jerusalem, by its magnificence, and by its being the future bride and wife of the lamb (19:7; 21:2, 9). Besides these I will cite only the following quotation from Revelation. When the new Jerusalem was seen descending from heaven it was said:*

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples; himself shall be with them, their God. And the nations that are saved shall walk in the light of it; and there shall be no night there. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let them come. And he that wisheth, let him take the water of life freely. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen (Rev. 21:3, 24–25; 22:16–17, 20).

"That's so different from my tradition. I was raised that the Second Coming is where only true Christians are saved. Everyone else is 'left behind.'"



"I know. That's what made Swedenborg so different. He rejected some of the basic concepts of Christianity; and said that being saved isn't about belief – it's about how we live our lives day by day."

774. *The Lord's presence is unceasing with every man, both the evil and the good, for without His presence no man lives; but His Coming is only to those who receive Him, who are such as believe on Him and keep His commandments. The Lord's unceasing presence causes man to become rational, and gives him the ability to*

become spiritual. This is effected by the light that goes forth from the Lord as the sun in the spiritual world, and that man receives in his understanding; for the heat that goes forth from that same sun is love to God and love toward the neighbor. [the 2nd coming], may be likened to presence of solar light in the world; unless this light is joined with heat all things on earth become desolate. But the coming of the Lord may be likened to the coming of heat, which takes place in spring; because heat then joins itself with light ...

"Swedenborg's view of the 2nd coming is like receiving the light of the sun. For those who open their hearts to receive this loving light it is like a spring day with flowers blossoming. This is the 2nd coming. It did happen, is happening, and will always be happening. We do not need to believe any particular thing; we only need to open our hearts to the love, and share it with others.....Look, here's an interesting book on my eBook reader: [The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation](#) by Barbara R. Rossing. [New York: Basic Books; a member of the Perseus Book Groups, 2004]. She writes:

In Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech he says: '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.' Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the New Jerusalem is similar to Swedenborg's. It is not something for us to dream about in the future; it is something for us to create now in this world. Longing for the New Jerusalem is the theme of many African-American spirituals such as "Gonna put on those golden shoes down by the riverside." Rossing asks where that river side is, and answers her own question: "For slaves, the New Jerusalem vision gave hope for freedom even in this life, for a riverside not just in heaven but experienced also as a very real river in their lives that could be crossed to freedom, here and now. They found a glimpse of the riverside of God in the geography of their place. That crossing between the two worlds is key to God's New Jerusalem for us as well.' [165]. The Second coming is about living NOW and changing our world NOW; not about preparing to be snatched off the earth. Swedenborg is all about living in the here and now; not preparing for some judgment and 2nd coming."



***10. (2) The human race is the seminary of heaven, ...
that heaven and hell are from the human race, and that therefore the human race is the
seminary of heaven.***

"Well, Tom, that sure is different from my tradition. But it does make sense. I wish you a happy New Church Day on the 19th as well as a happy Father's Day tomorrow!"

Let us pray.

PRAYER FROM Rev. JUDITH

Inspiration & Prayer for 6/9/13:

This week is focusing on New Church Day! What does this mean to you? It might be an opportunity to get more involved in the renewal of the Churches focus. Convention is coming up, and though I am unable to travel to it, my heart and mind will be focused on what changes in our church will be thought about and enacted.

Two years ago I wrote a sermon titled "Five Smooth Stones". It was based on the battle of David and Goliath. David brought five smooth stones to the battle and his slingshot. With these tools he defeated Goliath. We are in a battle of the survival of our churches and its members due to the economic climate of our world. The five smooth stones are a metaphor of our current battle to stay alive. What five talents do you possess that you bring to your New Church, and its prosperity and growth? What better way to celebrate New Church Day than to do some reflection? Think about it, and then hopefully act on it.

"Our Beloved God who shows us all in life, guide us in our reflections of our lives and in the life of the New Church. Help us to find that place of belonging where we can give of our talents to the body of Christ. Help us to live in prosperity as a church body, and as individuals. Help us to know your will for your church and for us. Give us the power to carry out your direction. We give deep thanks for life, for your love, and for our daily bread and communion with you. AMEN.
Love & Blessings, Rev. Judith



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Helen Keller: Eyes with Vision

June 23, 2013

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."

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.

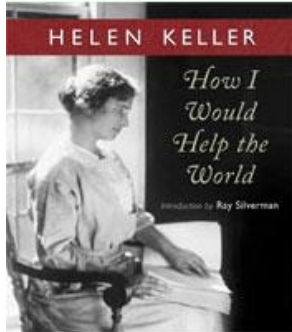
People who focus exclusively on externals do not even know what is good or what is true; When we are conceived anew, however, we first begin to be aware that our "good" is not good. And as we advance further into the light, it dawns on us that the Lord exists and that he is goodness and truth itself. 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.

Heavenly Secrets, NCE

MESSAGE

HELEN KELLER'S SWEDENBORGIAN LIFE

Part I: Eyes with Vision



Laurie Klein, a New Church woman, had a dream last year in which a large crowd was begging her to “*help Helen Keller help the world.*” Laurie shared this dream several weeks later at Gathering Leaves, an international conference of Swedenborgian women held in Byrn Athyn, PA. There was excited discussion about a short essay Helen Keller had written as an introduction to Swedenborg’s *True Christianity*. The essay was called *How I Would Help the World*. At one time it had been issued as a pamphlet, but was no longer easy to access. It focused on how Swedenborg influenced Helen Keller’s spiritual development, and her understanding of “uses” in the living of her life.

The Swedenborg Foundation became excited about a project of making this essay widely available. They released a new book earlier this year titled, *How I Would Help the World*, by Helen Keller with an introduction by Ray Silverman, Keller’s New Church biographer. The book contains beautiful photos and artistically-presented Swedenborgian quotes. Herb Ziegler gave a great review of this new release in the April Messenger.

Helen wrote: *The only thing worse than being blind is having eyes but no vision.*” Helen was blind, but she had the inner sight and the vision to see the world through Swedenborgian eyes.

Here are some of the main points Silverman covers in his introduction.

Helen Adams Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, on June 27, 1880.

For nineteen months she was an ordinary child, with a pleasant disposition and a love of life. However, in February 1882, Helen contracted an illness that left her blind and deaf. It has been conjectured that this may have been scarlet fever. She grew up in a dark and silent world.

Captain Arthur Keller and his wife Kate struggled to raise Helen. By six years old, Helen was completely out of control. Her frustrated parents searched for help and eventually were told to

contact Alexander Graham Bell. Bell's mother was deaf, and he married a deaf woman. Bell's passion was to find ways to help people whose ears did not hear. In his work, he stumbled upon the invention of the telephone, for which he was awarded the distinguished Volta prize of fifty thousand francs—equivalent to about \$200,000 today. In 1880 (the same year that Helen Keller was born) Bell used the prize money to establish the Volta Bureau in Washington, D.C., "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge about the deaf." He hired John Hitz to serve as the first superintendent of the bureau. At the time, Hitz was living in Washington, D.C., and serving as the consul general for Switzerland. He was also partially deaf. He was also an enthusiastic New Churchman.

In the summer of 1886, Bell hears the pleas for help from the Keller's, and he agreed to meet Helen and her parents. They met in Washington, D.C., over dinner. Helen sat on Bell's lap, felt his long beard, and was drawn to his caring nature.

Years later, she wrote, *"I did not dream that interview would be the door through which I should pass from darkness into light."*

Bell suggested that they hire a tutor from the Perkins School for the Blind in Newton, MA. For many years, the Swedenborg School of Religion was located just a few blocks from the Perkins School. [It is now "The Swedenborgian House of Studies" on the campus of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

The Perkins school recommended twenty-one-year-old teacher Anne Sullivan for Helen. Anne arrived at Helen's home in 1887, a few months before Helen's 7th birthday.

Several years later, Helen composed a short story for the birthday of Michael Anagnos, the director of the Perkins School. Anagnos was delighted with this story, called "The Frost King," and arranged to have it published in a magazine. The story became very popular and was re-issued by other magazines. One reader noted that Helen's story was very similar to a story written seventeen years earlier by Margaret Canby called "The Frost Fairies." Actually, Silverman tells us that whole sentences and paragraphs were almost identical. Much to her surprise and dismay, Helen was accused of plagiarism, and an unpleasant investigation followed.

When she was an adult, Helen wrote: *"No child ever drank deeper of the cup of bitterness than I did. I had disgraced myself. I had brought suspicion on those I loved best."* She longed to die.

When Alexander Graham Bell heard about the incident, he was convinced that Helen was innocent. To prove it, he sent the superintendent of his bureau for the deaf, Swedenborgian John Hitz. Hitz discovered that Helen had an incredible memory. The story, The Frost Fairies, had been read to her when she was eight, and it became etched in her subconscious memory. Margaret Canby, the author of The Frost Fairies became a strong supporter of Helen.

The friendship between Hitz and Helen deepened. Helen later wrote:

He loved to take me out walking early in the morning while the dew lay upon the grass and tree, and the air was joyous with birdsong. We wandered through still woods, fragrant meadows, past the picturesque stone walls of Wrentham, and always he brought me closer to beauty and the deep meaning of nature. As he talked, the great world shone for me in the beauty of immortality. . . . We would often pause that I might feel the swaying of the trees, the bending of the flowers, and the waving of the corn, and he would say, "The wind that puts all this life into nature is a marvelous symbol of the spirit of God." Throughout their long friendship, Hitz introduced Helen to the great thinkers of the world, and especially to the religious teachings of Emanuel

Swedenborg. In her gratitude, Helen called Hitz her *Pflegevater*—"the foster-father of my soul."

When Helen was fourteen, Hitz gave her a copy of Swedenborg's *Heaven & Hell* in Braille. It was an experience of awakening for her that was comparable to her early work with Anne Sullivan, when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

In 1908, John Hitz died of a heart attack at the age of eighty. But he would live on in Helen's memory as the foster-father of her soul, the ministering angel who came to her during the darkest time in her life. The interview with Alexander Graham Bell many years before had indeed been the door through which Helen Keller passed "from darkness into light." However, it was not merely the light of a mental awakening through Anne Sullivan; it was also the light of a spiritual awakening through John Hitz and the inspired teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Helen had many admirers, but one of her greatest was the American author and humorist Mark Twain. Calling her "the wonder of the ages," Twain wrote:
Helen Keller has been dumb, stone deaf, and stone blind, ever since she was a little baby a year-and-a-half old; and now . . . this miraculous creature, this wonder of the ages, passes the Harvard University examination in Latin, German, French history, belles-lettres, and such things, and does it brilliantly, too, not in a commonplace fashion. She doesn't know merely things; she is splendidly familiar with the meanings of them. When she writes an essay on a Shakespearian character, her English is fine and strong, her grasp of the subject is the grasp of one who knows, and her page is electric with light.

Helen did indeed carry the banner of social reform to all and she fought valiantly to raise consciousness about the plight of the handicapped. But Helen's social reform did not stop at combating preventable blindness. She took up many other causes as well; she campaigned for women's right to vote at a time when it was politically incorrect to do so; she became a powerful voice against social injustice; she spoke out boldly against racial prejudice; she decried corrupt politics, denounced business greed, and openly deplored the horrors of war. And yet, she always returned to the needs of the blind and the deaf. On their behalf, she traveled the globe six times, and visited dignitaries in every land. She spoke often and passionately not only about the plight of the handicapped, but also about their potential. In her foot-every human life is precious.

Helen wrote: *Were I but capable of interpreting to others one-half of the stimulating thoughts and noble sentiments that are buried in Swedenborg's writings, I should help them more than I am ever likely to in any other way. It would be such a joy to me if I might be the instrument of bringing Swedenborg to a world that is spiritually deaf and blind.*

In Part II, we'll look more closely at what Helen wrote in her essay about what parts of Swedenborg's writings that she would like to teach the world.

Let us pray.

Inspiration and Prayer:

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." For rest from the care of life, you can turn to God each day in prayer and communion. Real relaxation and serenity come from a deep sense of the fundamental goodness of the universe. God's everlasting arms are underneath all and will support you. Commune with God, not so much for

petitions to be granted as for the rest that comes from relying on His will and His purposes for your life. BE sure of God's strength available to you, be conscious of His support and wait quietly until that true rest from God fills you're being.

From "Twenty-four Hours a Day", Hazelden

Holy One that is in all life we ask for your Blessing of Holy Rest. To be with us in our lives when we need the quiet of Your stillness, so we may hear your will for our lives. Give us the power to carry out your will. Keep us mindful of our need to rely completely on you, your strength, and your Grace. We ask for the blessing of Your "Peace that passeth all understanding". Thank you Lord, thank you.

AMEN

Love,
Rev. Judith

Helen Keller's River of Light

June 30, 2013



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Love, Spirit, Life

READINGS

FROM SCRIPTURE

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."¹

□ ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah."

FROM SWEDENBORG

AE 518

[3] The reason why rivers signify the understanding of truth, and also intelligence, is, that waters signify truths, the understanding being a receptacle and collection (complexus) of truths, as a river is of waters, and that thought from the understanding, which is intelligence, is as it were a stream of truth. From the same origin, that is, from the signification of waters, which denote truths, it is that a fountain signifies the Word, and the doctrine of truth, and that pools, lakes, and seas, signify the cognitions of truth in their entire compass.

MESSAGE

Helen Keller's Swedenborgian Life
Pt. II: The River of Light



From the age of 16, Helen Keller wanted to tell the world about Swedenborg. What was it she wanted others to know?

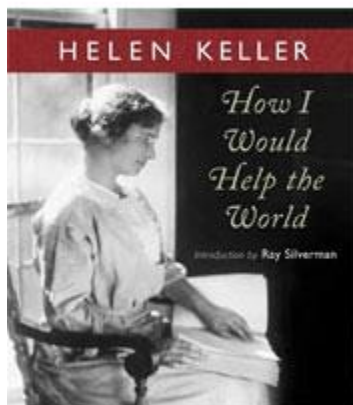
Swedenborg's writings had transformed her life. As a teen-ager she struggled with

spiritual questions trying to make sense of her disabilities. Anne Sullivan had been her teacher in childhood when she needed to understand how to communicate. As a teenager, she needed to understand God, and John Hitz became her spiritual mentor. He was director of Alexander Graham Bell's Bureau for the Deaf. And he was a Swedenborgian. Hitz gave Helen a copy of *Heaven & Hell* in braille when she was 16. It transformed her life spiritually, just as Anne Sullivan had awakened her ability to communicate.

As an adult, she was asked to write an introduction to Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion*. This may be the most dramatic writing she did about Swedenborg. Her writing is filled with images of dark, light, seeing, hearing. Her focus is a river – but not of water; one of light.

For a person who probably had no memory of seeing light, she has extremely rich analogies about light. It is probably for her a kind of correspondence. To Swedenborg, a river could be truth. For Helen, it was a band of light taking her to God.

What was important to Helen about God? Let's look at a summary of each of the three sections of her essay.



I. A GREAT RIVER OF LIGHT

INSIDE INSTEAD OF OUTSIDE

Helen says that God takes people into themselves instead of out into world of disagreements. God teaches us to listen to the inward voice rather than to opinions and disputations. She has become especially grateful for this writing because it

Turns my darkness to light

This is a key phrase in understanding why Swedenborg was so important to Keller. He brought her from darkness into light.

I acknowledge my profound indebtedness to Emanuel Swedenborg for a richer interpretation of the Bible, a deeper understanding of the meaning of Christianity, and a precious sense of the divine presence in the world.

She also writes that it was an irresistible impulse that led her into his writings.

I have many times tried to recall the feeling that led me to take Swedenborg's interpretation of Christianity rather than my father's: but I can find no satisfactory answer. It was with me as it was with Joseph Conrad, when an irresistible impulse urged him to go to sea. Like him, I took "a, so to speak, standing jump out of my associations" and traditions—and the rest is what I have grown to believe.

BASIC DOCTRINE:

She distills Swedenborg's many books into a simple philosophy.

*The theological teachings of Swedenborg are **in many** long volumes. The summation, the universal theology, is found in his magnum opus, True Christian Religion. But his central doctrine is simple. It consists of three main ideas: God as divine love, God as divine wisdom, and God as power for use. These ideas come as waves from an ocean which floods every bay and harbor of life with new potency of will, of faith, and of effort.*

GOD ALLOWS US TO SEE:

here she returns to that basic thesis that God brings sight to all of us. *To our conception of God, the Word, and the Hereafter, which we have received on trust from ages of unproved faith, Swedenborg gives a new actuality, which is as startling, as thrilling as the angel— sung tidings of the Lord's birth. He brings fresh testimony to support our hope that the veil shall be drawn from unseeing eyes, that the dull ear shall be quickened and dumb lips gladdened with speech.*

And here she returns to her central point:

The only really blind [are those who] cannot see the truth.

The only really blind are those who will not see the truth—those who shut their eyes to the spiritual vision. For then alone, darkness is irrevocable. Those who explore the dark with love as a torch and trust as a guide find it good. Blind people who have eyes know that they live in a spiritual world inconceivably more wonderful than the material world that is veiled from them. The landscapes they behold never fade. The flowers they look upon are the immortal flowers which grow in God's garden. Swedenborg's message is like the rock smitten by Moses, yielding sweet streams of healing water...

Swedenborg is trying to bring us to God's light. Here is one of her most beautiful paragraphs on that topic:

I have walked through its sunlit ways of truth, I have drunk of its sweet waters of knowledge, and the eyes of my spirit have been opened, so that I know the joy of vision which conquers darkness and circles heaven. Of one thing I am sure: any effort is worthwhile that brings comfort to limited, struggling human beings in a dark, self-centered age: and Swedenborg's message has meant so much to me & It has given color and reality and unity to my thought of the life to come: it has exalted my ideas of love, truth, and usefulness: it has been my strongest incitement to overcome limitations. The atmosphere Swedenborg creates absorbs me completely. His slightest phrase is significant to me. Here is an exquisitely quietening and soothing power in the thoughts of Swedenborg for people of my temperament. I wish I might be able to radiate the spiritual illumination that came to me when I read with my own fingers Heaven and Hell. All the days of my life since have "proved the doctrine" and found it true.

II A Noble Conception of God

IT IS THE WORLD THAT IS BLIND AND DEAF.

Were I but capable of interpreting to others one half of the stimulating thoughts and noble sentiments that are buried in Swedenborg's writings, I should help them more than I am ever likely to in any other way. It would be such a joy to me if I might be the instrument of bringing Swedenborg to a world that is spiritually deaf and blind.

GOD IS LIFE

Swedenborg's world view is most about doing good: uses.

All through his writings, Swedenborg teaches that all true religion is of the life and that the life of religion is to do good. He also tells us that the Word. The Law of Life—has its fullness, its holiness, and its power in the sense of the letter and in our acts. Every parable, ever correspondence in the Word demands our faithful performance of every service essential to the health, enlightenment, and liberation of mankind. His message is to strive to fill the practicalities of the world with the Spirit.

Beliefs are of little consequence to God. It is our daily actions that matter. *Beliefs that set up fictitious excellencies and encourage devotional feelings that do not have for an object the good of mankind, become substitutes for a righteous, useful life. Such beliefs darken all morality.*

III. A LOVE THAT EMBRACES ALL

In this short concluding section, she has a moving ending:

The joy inspired by the concept of the Lords Divine Humanity is like the **sun** with its threefold glory of warmth, light, and activity. It is like the satisfaction with which one beholds the happy balance of soul, mind, and body in a beautiful human being, or the perfect work of seed sprouting into blossom and the blossom yielding luscious fruit.

In the previous section, she wrote: *It would be such a joy to me if I might be the instrument of bringing Swedenborg to a world that is spiritually deaf and blind.*
Do you think she achieved her goal?

Let us pray.

Prayer for 10/9/11:

Thank you God for my life and my loved ones, friends and family. I am grateful for all your blessings, Big and small. Amen.

Love, Rev. Judith

Let's also pray for Rev. Judith's rapid recovery from a visit to the Emergency Room last night. She is doing fine, but is tired.



Freedom!

July 7, 2013

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

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 2870 2870. HUMAN FREEDOM

Few know what freedom is and what non-freedom is. Freedom seems to entail everything that is in keeping with any love and associated delight, and non-freedom to entail everything that is at variance with these. That which is in keeping with self-love and love of the world, and with the desires belonging to those loves, seems to man to be freedom; but that is the freedom of hell. That however which is in keeping with love to the Lord and love towards the neighbour, consequently with the love of what is good and true, is true freedom, being the freedom that exists in heaven.

Message

Freedom!

My trip home from the annual church convention this year was filled with adventure. My flight from Detroit to Portland, ME, was delayed for hours, and then finally cancelled. I had to spend the night in Detroit with the uncertainty of when I could finally get a flight home. I finally arrived, 24 hours after planned. Having so recently been living in the insecurity of airport travel, I could identify with those whose trips and lives were so traumatically interrupted on Asiana flight #214 on July 6th. I can't imagine the experience of flying for so many hours, then having a brutal landing, and then ending up in the hospital. Hundreds of people's lives were disrupted -- with the passengers, their families and friends, and many other air travelers diverted



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that day. I am sending my prayers today to those many people.

In the summer of 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 entertaining and thought-provoking 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! Of course, I mentioned something about "taxation without representation," and we politely changed the subject.

When the movie version came out in 1972, I saw it eagerly, and again laughed and cried with the characters struggling to create freedom in their lives. This past week-end, I downloaded the movie in order to watch it again on the July 4th week-end.

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 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. Older 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?]*

In this song, I think about the many times someone has a vision for a different future, but isn't sure anyone else sees that vision or even cares about it.

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?

Swedenborg provides us a different perspective on spiritual freedom. We may think we are free inside, but actually be in bondage to influence from inner demons. When we turn our will over to Divine guidance, we may feel we are giving up our free will, but will actually be living in ultimate freedom. When we make our decisions from a place of love, we are living in freedom.

From this perspective, there are ways that a person in prison can live with freedom, and ways that a person able to do and go as he/she chooses can be in a state of bondage.

In 2013, 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, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington could have been written into history as traitors to the king with Benedict Arnold being a true hero. 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.

In what ways do you live in freedom, and in what ways do you live in bondage? How can you live in greater freedom in your spiritual life and in your physical life?

Let us pray.

God, creator of all, as we walk through our lives with you, give us the understanding of how powerful a life of obedience and service to you is. Serving you, not out of slavery, but out of a willing heart. When we falter give us the strength to come to you with our circumstances. Help us to know the way you want us to go. Change us as your servants into loving, compassionate beings that love all your creations, animal, vegetable and human. We give gratitude for our lives and abundance this day, thank you for your bounty. Bless us with the clarity to understand you and our walk with you. AMEN"

Love, Blessings and hugs, Rev. Judith



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SLAVERY!

July 14, 2013

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Exodus 2:23

New International Version (NIV)

23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

FROM SWEDENBORG

A human being is an organ of life, and God alone is life. God pours his life into the organ and all its parts, as the sun pours its warmth into a tree and all its parts. Further, God grants people a sense that the life in them seems to be their own. ... Our free choice results from the fact that we have a sense that the life we enjoy belongs to us. TCR 504:5

Message Slavery!

The musical, 1776, is a delightful experience of how the United States came into existence as a free country. See [last week's message](#) for more about the birth of our freedom. Most of the events of the movie are true. One of the more sobering facts is that Thomas Jefferson, in the original version of the Declaration of Independence, condemned slavery. He wrote about King George:

he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. determined to keep open a market Where men should be bought & sold. he has prostituted his negative¹ for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce; and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die,² he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people for whom he also obtruded them:³ thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another.]



The states that had slaves refused to accept the Declaration of Independence with that paragraph included, and it had to be deleted in order to pass the Declaration. The Revolutionary War ended in 1783, but almost another hundred years would pass before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

As the War of Independence was coming to a close, the war on slavery was just gaining steam.

Swedenborgians were actively involved in that war.

If you saw the movie, *Amazing Grace*, you saw the inspiring life of **William Wilberforce** in England who fought to end the British slave trade. Wilberforce had been inspired by **John Newton**, a former slave ship captain who had an epiphany, and wrote *Amazing Grace*. Read this story in an earlier message on this site. One of the people working with Wilberforce was a Swedenborgian, **Carl Bernhard Wadstrom** [1746-1799]. Swedish Wadstrom's life overlapped Swedenborg's [who died in 1772]. He was impressed with Swedenborg's references to Africans in the spiritual world, and felt that he had to take a stand against slavery.

He worked with a number of people, including British Swedenborgians, to set up a colony on the coast of Sierra Leone for freed slaves. The colony was attacked by French privateers in 1795, and most of the settlers were killed. The colony eventually failed.

Wilberforce called a number of witnesses in the British House of Commons in support of ending the slave trade. One person he called on was Charles Berns Wadstrom.

This book shows that Wadstrom was working actively with Wilberforce in England.

The Select Committee on the Slave Trade (1790)

In April 1790 a British Government Select Committee called Charles Berns Wadstrom to testify before them. They published his testimony on 11 May 1790 in a report entitled Minutes of the evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Slave Trade.

In discussing the kidnapping and mass enslavement of Africans, the Select Committee cross examined a number of expert witnesses who had first-hand experience of the enslaving process. Mr. Wadstrom, for example, was particularly well informed about its impact on the West African territories today called Senegal, Gambia, and Gorée Island. What follows here is taken from his testimony given on 29 April 1790.

Wilberforce was not a Swedenborgian, but he had read Swedenborg. [See The Life of William Wilberforce by Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, p. 82.

A Swedenborgian in the United States active in the abolition movement was **Lydia Maria Francis Child** [1802-1880]. She learned about Swedenborg when she was a teen-ager in Gardiner, ME and joined the church in 1822.

“Unfortunately, because she did not believe that the ministers were taking a strong enough stand against slavery in their sermons, she soon became disgruntled with their leadership. Childs could not understand why many of the clergy did not become more actively involved in social movements. In spite of her feeling toward the church organization, the ideas

of Swedenborg permeated her thoughts and writing and she believed that the only true church organization is one in which heads and hearts unite in working for the welfare of the human race.”

“In 1828, Lydia Maria Francis married David Lee Child, a Boston attorney and Massachusetts legislator. Through William Lloyd Garrison, an active abolitionist, the couple became more aware of the horrors of the treatment of Africans in the slave states.” [Susan Poole, 5]

In 1833 she wrote: An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans, the first anti-slavery book published in the U.S. In this work she promoted emancipation and an end to racial discrimination, using historical, political, economic, moral, and spiritual arguments to show that Africans were intellectually and spiritually equal to others. [Poole, 5]

Child was determined to be one of the few who took action against the horrors of slavery. In her view, which parallels Swedenborg’s beliefs, apathy was considered to be a great sin. Swedenborg believed that people should take their talents, skills, and loves, and put them into use.” [Poole, p.6]

In 1841, she became editor of *The Anti-Slavery Standard* in New York.

Julia Ward Howe [1819-1910] was another activist. During the Civil War Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." As she became more famous, she was frequently asked to speak publicly. She began to speak about the horrors of war, and became an advocate for peace.

She worked with the widows and orphans of soldiers on both sides of the war.

In 1870, she decided that peace and equality were the two most important things in the world. She called for women to rise up and oppose all forms of war.

She wanted to create a Mothers’ Day for Peace, and published “A Mother’s Day Proclamation” calling women to pacifism. See a [previous message](#) about her involvement in the early history of Mother’s Day.

Lucretia Coffin Mott [1793-1880] was another Swedenborgian active in the early anti-slavery movement.

“She helped establish the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, but was barred from the international anti-slavery convention in London in 1840 because she was a woman. Focused on the Women’s Suffrage Movement. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mott organized the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York. Worked closely with Harriot Hunt. [Poole, 105]

At the June, 2013, annual Convention in Urbana, Ohio, a mini-course on human trafficking was presented by Lois Krebs and Rev. Nadine Cotton -- [Slavery Has NOT Been Abolished: The Nightmare of Human Trafficking.](#)

-

They said: *It is the 150th year anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, but this document and the civil war did not put an end to slavery. Believe it or not, the buying and selling of human beings for forced labor and for commercial sex is a thriving and expanding industry today and happening in the U.S.*

For more information, visit the [Health and Human Services website on human trafficking.](#)

Swedenborgians have been at the forefront fighting, and in the background inspiring, to end slavery throughout their history.

It is not a surprise that now, in 2013, Swedenborgians are becoming involved in ending modern slavery: human trafficking. Swedenborgians were instrumental in ending the slave trade and slavery. We can expect, again, that their involvement will bring an end to this affront to Divine Love and Wisdom.

Let us Pray.

"Dear Lord, give us the Heart to examine our own lives in true clarity. Show us where we are enslaved and where we enslave others. Help us to daily see the truth of our living slavery. Bless those who are too weak to break the bonds of slavery and give them the glory of freedom. May Love and Peace reign in their lives forever. Thank you Lord for your daily Blessings. AMEN."



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Watering the Soul's Garden

July 21, 2013

READINGS

FROM THE THE BIBLE

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

4 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.^[a])

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

FROM SWEDENBORG

10238. 'And put water in it' means the truths of faith by means of which purification in the natural is accomplished. This is clear from the meaning of 'water' as the truths of faith, dealt with in 28, 739, 2702, 3058, 3424, 4976, 5668, 8568, 9323; and from the meaning of 'the laver' as the natural, dealt with above in 10235. Anyone who does not know that 'water' means the truths of faith will fail to grasp the meaning of very many statements in the Word, such as unless a person is born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God, John 3:5. Those who take water here to mean nothing other than water think that the water of baptism is the means by which a person is regenerated. But in fact the water does nothing towards regeneration, only the truth of



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*faith and the good of love do so; for water washes away solely dirt that is on the body
and by no means evils present in the heart.*

Message

WATERING THE SOUL'S GARDEN

This past week has been one of the hottest ever on record in the East. Even on coastal Maine, surrounded by trees, I was in 95 degree heat with intense humidity. I didn't dare let my pets out in the heat; I kept them in my air conditioned study. Many people found relief in the ocean and the lakes and rivers. Kids took to back-yard pools and spraying hoses. At the weekly farmer's market on Saturday morning, I heard about a week of watering gardens, and worries about losing crops in the heat.

Last night the thunderstorms came through, and now cool air has replaced the heat wave. What a relief! Cool waters from heaven have brought relief to humans, animals, and vegetation.

As we begin our series on *REST, RENEWAL, AND RECHARGE: A VACATION FOR YOUR SOUL*. As so many of us in the U.S. are pulling out of a heat wave, I'd like to begin with celebrating the renewing energy in water.

When I want to water the garden in my soul, I often turn to writings from mystics throughout history. One of most nourishing mystics for me is Teresa of Avila. She lived from 1515 to 1582, dying about a hundred years before Swedenborg was born. She was a nun who reformed the Carmelites, and was a teacher to John of the Cross.

One of my favorite writings of Teresa is about how we water our gardens -- and how our life of prayer is like watering a garden. She was only 47 year old when she finished writing her first explanation of prayer, in *The Book of Her Life*, chapters 11 to 20.

Teresa saw the soul as part of our inner being; just as Swedenborg did later. So prayer is a way of coming to know this deepest part of the self.

She saw two main categories of prayer: meditation and contemplation. The former is prayer that is intentional, and requires some effort. Unlike it's common usage today, "meditation" to Teresa was something highly structured and requiring much effort. Contemplation is just a grace of God, and our only act is to receive it.

Structured prayer is how most of us begin our prayer life; and is also how we first try to water our garden.

Imagine that God has presented you with a lovely plot of land in an arid area. The soil is tilled; God has planted the seeds. God has even removed all of the weeds.

There is only one thing you need to do: water the garden, through prayer.

MEDITATION: STRUCTURED PRAYER



So, one begins to pray. One might purchase books, and read the prayers that are in the books. Or one might attend church and listen the prayers being offered.

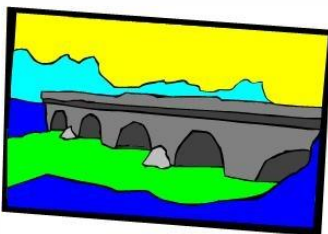
The first attempt to water the garden is using a well and a bucket. You have to raise up the water from the well, and then carry the bucket of water to the garden. It is a lot of work, and produces a minimal amount of water.

These prayers can go on for years. Eventually, however, they lose their attractiveness. They are empty. They prayer takes more energy than we have.

We realize that we put incredible effort to watering God's garden, but we get only a small amount of water into the soil.

We are ready to try another form of prayer, as we move into the early stages of "contemplative" models of prayer, where we let God do more of the guiding.

THE PRAYER OF QUIET



Now we will water the garden with a water wheel and an aqueduct. It requires less work, and produces more water.

One may become confused and frustrated about the process of prayer. The person's will is less active, because of the confusion. So one may turn to God and ask for guidance.

Here are some of the things she says about the Prayer of Quiet:

The gardener obtains more water with less labor.

In no way can the soul acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make.

All that takes place here brings with it the greatest consolation and with so little labor that prayer does not tire one, even though it last for a long while.

The tears God gives are now accompanied by joy.

There is no striving for them.

The soul is now ascending above its misery and receiving a little knowledge of the delights of glory. His Majesty is beginning to communicate Himself to this soul and He wants it to experience how He is doing so.

During the time of this prayer, everything is "yes".

The "no" comes afterward upon seeing that the delight is ended and that one cannot recover it. God in His greatness desires that this soul understand that He is so close it no longer needs to send Him messengers but can speak with Him itself and not by shouting since He is so near that when it merely moves its lips, He understands it.

This prayer is a little spark of the Lord's true love which He begins to enkindle in the soul.

This little spark is the sign or the pledge God gives to this soul that He now chooses it for great things if it will prepare itself to receive them.

This spark is a great gift, much more so that I can express.

from the website of [Inner Explorations](#).

THE PRAYER OF INFUSION

The third way to water the garden is to use flowing water from a near-by stream.

This way is moving deeper into contemplation; where the faculties are more deeply asleep. The flowers are blooming in the garden. It is "infused" in that one is not doing anything to be in this state of prayer; it just happens. In the prayer of quiet, one just wanted to sit quietly and be with God; like Mary. Now one is energized to out in the world and do good deeds – uses – for others. One combines Martha with Mary, so that one is "engaged in both the active and contemplative life together.

One may struggle some with giving up the old structures in one's prayer life, but by giving more

spontaneous, one's garden is filled with water.

This state is a glorious folly, a heavenly madness, in which true Wisdom is acquired. The flowers in the garden are blooming. "It is well," Teresa says, "for the soul to abandon itself completely into the arms of God."

There is an apparent union with God, but it is not yet complete.

THE PRAYER OF UNION

In the fourth form of prayer, the gardener does nothing to water the ground. God sends the rains. It is "heavenly water" in great abundance; soaking the ground and saturating entire garden.

The soul is now in union with God. Teresa could experience it, but could not explain it.

Now how this prayer they call union comes about, and what it is, I don't know how to explain. ... what I'm attempting to explain is what the soul feels when it is in Divine union. What union is we already know since it is two separate things becoming one...

The will must be fully occupied in loving, but it cannot understand how it loves; the understanding, if it understands, does not understand how it understands, or at least can comprehend nothing of what it understands. It does not seem to me to be understanding, because, as I say, it does not understand itself. Nor can I myself understand this.

Teresa says the prayer of union is a temporary experience: *if it were to last for half an hour, that would be a long time-I do not think it has ever lasted that long with me. In union, all the capacities of the soul seem completely undone. They "are suspended in such a way that it is impossible to believe they are active. The impact is not in the experience itself but in the effect it has on the person. Teresa describes the effect as profound certitude, confidence, and courage in intimacy with God-an empowerment to live fully, boldly, with immense creativity and love: precisely the way Teresa herself lived the last twenty years of her life.*



Teresa seems to say that, in our real world, we are not meant to ignore our gardens and just wait for rain. *if there were no winter and the weather were always mild, there would be no lack of flowers and fruit. but this is impossible while we are living on the earth. Individuals must always take care so that when one kind of water is lacking they might strive for another. The water from heaven often comes when the gardener is least expecting it.*

I take this to mean that our prayer lives are not a neat hierarchy. We need different forms of prayers at different times, and need to be open to whatever is right for us at a given time.

I wonder if Swedenborg knew about her works, because he sometimes uses analogies similar to hers, including his writings on "water" and "gardens."

Water, for Swedenborg, was about truth and clarity. In the reading above, he talks about water as a correspondence for "truths of faith." Here is another Swedenborg quotation about water from *Secrets of Heaven*:

2702. 'And she saw a well of water' means the Lord's Word from which truths are drawn. This is clear from the meaning of 'a well of water' and of 'a spring' as the Word, also as doctrine drawn from the Word, and consequently as truth itself, dealt with in what follows immediately below; and from the meaning of 'water' as truth. That 'a well' which has water in it, and 'a spring', mean the Word of the Lord, also doctrine drawn from the Word, and so consequently truth itself, may become clear from very many places.

In the scripture reading above, Jesus talks about his teachings as water that nourishes our spiritual being, so that we will never thirst again and live forever in heaven.

Swedenborg also has important words about gardens:

Since gardens correspond to our religion, throughout heaven there are gardens that produce leaves, flowers, and fruit according to the spiritual state of the angels. I have been told that in some of these gardens, there are trees of life at the center and trees of the knowledge of good and evil around the edges--a sign that the angels have free will in spiritual matters. In the Bible, our religion is often pictured as a garden, a field, and a sheepfold. It is pictured as a garden because of the trees there; as a field because of the crops that nourish people; and as a sheepfold because of the sheep, which stand for people who are faithful and useful. (Coronis 27.3)

Carl Jung, the great spiritual psychologist, who had read Swedenborg, had an approach to "water" similar to Teresa's and Swedenborg:

Here are notes taken during one of Jung's lectures:

Whenever water appears, it is usually the water of life, meaning a medium through which one is reborn. It symbolizes a sort of baptism ceremony or initiation; a healing bath that gives resurrection or rebirth.

[John Welch, page 61.]

For Jung, water conveyed the depth of human richness and depth within our deepest being. For Swedenborg, it was about truth. Teresa used it as a way of explaining prayer to us.

What does this mean for our summer to rest, renewal, and recharging of the soul? Look at how much effort you put into watering your garden. Instead of trying so hard to carry water to it, sit back and peace and give God a chance to send the rains.

Notice images of "water" in your dreams. Is God sending you messages about truth, peace, and rebirth in your life?

Let us pray.



Beloved Lord, thank you for the PROMPTING! We know that all things of evaluation and change come from you. Thank you for your guidance of us over the last six months. Please keep us close to you as we take a clarifying look at our lives. Help us to balance where we need to balance, rest where we need rest, and take action where we need to take action. We are grateful for the times of quiet, rest and renewal with you. Blessings abound...give rest to the weary, peace to the grieving, strength to the weak, focus to the scattered, understanding to the unsure, and love to all. AMEN.

Love, Rev. Judith

Taking God on Vacation

July 28, 2013

**READINGS
FROM THE THE BIBLE**

1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)

Love

1 If 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. 2 If 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. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

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

8 Love 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. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When 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. 12 Now 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.

13 And 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



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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

TAKING GOD ON VACATION



I picked up the ringing phone and heard Denise's excited voice, "My husband and I are going on vacation next week! His boss found some vacation coverage for him, so we can get away together for the week. We so need that!" Denise had been talking in her counseling sessions with me about the strain in her relationship with her husband, since with his new job they hadn't had any vacation time together in a long time. I knew that time alone together was just what they needed, and I was very happy for them.

I thought about how the same thing can be true in our relationship with God. Sometimes we need to find some time alone with God to keep the relationship vibrant. So how does one vacation with God? Sometimes just taking some quiet time to be aware of how much we love God can make the difference.



Below are some love poems to and about God written by mystics throughout history. You are invited to print out the poems, and take them along to the beach, or sit in the sun, or in the cool shade, and give yourself some time to enjoy love poetry about God.

One of the most famous love poems is by John of the Cross. He found time alone at night to feel God's presence.

STANZAS OF THE SOUL

1. *On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings—oh, happy chance!—*

I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.

2. *In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised—oh, happy chance!—*

In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.

3. *In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide, save that which burned
in my heart.*

4. *This light guided me More surely than the light of noonday
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me— A
place where none appeared.*

5. *Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the
Beloved!*

6. *Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of
the cedars made a breeze.*

7. *The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his locks;
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck And caused all my senses
to be suspended.*

8. *I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I reclined on the Beloved.
All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my cares forgotten
among the lilies.*

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 one of Rumi's poems:

*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."

To Swedenborg, God is love itself. God IS love.

Swedenborg is clear that our love of the Lord is the center of all loves and of our lives. Swedenborg helps us remember that the God's Love is the center of our being, and reminds to live every moment expressing that love through our uses in life.

Poetry about love and longing for God is also found in many Christian traditions. 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 know Christian mystical 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 sure.
Only union with the Friend can cure it.*

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.*

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 we forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us.

When you plan your vacation, remember to include God. You can build in some time for quiet and reflection, or bring along inspiring material to read. One of the best things about

vacationing with God is that we don't have to go anywhere to have a vacation together. Like the fish, you can just open your mouth, and drink in God's vibrant love!



Let us pray.

Rev. Judith



Dear Lord teach me to take your Love deeply inside my being. Teach me to keep my focus on you. Let me be the observer only, of this world. Thank you for my soul's rest and renewal each day. Gratitude fills my heart for all I have been given both good and bad. The good uplifts me and the bad strengthens me. My heart fills with love for all beings. Let me walk in deep peace with you knowing your love fills me completely. AMEN

With Love, Rev. Judith

The Soul's Sabbath, Part 1

August 4, 2013

READINGS

FROM THE THE BIBLE

8 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20, New International version

FROM SWEDENBORG

10730. And on the seventh day there shall be to you holiness, a Sabbath of Sabbath to Jehovah. That this signifies the second state of the regeneration of man, when he has conjunction with the Lord; and that in the supreme sense it signifies the union of the Lord's Human with the Divine Itself; is evident from the representation of the Sabbath, as being the second state of the regeneration of man, when he is in good, and thus is led by the Lord (see n. 8510, 8890, 8893, 9274); and as being in the supreme sense the union of the Human with the Divine Itself in the Lord (n. 8495, 10367, 10374). For when the Lord was in the world, He first made His Human Divine truth; but when He went out from the world, He made His Human Divine good through a union with the Divine Itself that was in Him. In the supreme sense this is represented by the Sabbath, and therefore it is called "a Sabbath of Sabbath to Jehovah." The Lord does the like with the man whom He is regenerating. He first imbues him with truths, and afterward by means of the truths He conjoins him with good, thus with Himself. This is represented by the Sabbath in the relative sense; for the regeneration of man is an image of the glorification of the Lord; that is, as the Lord glorified His Human, so He regenerates man.

[2] By the "Sabbath" in its proper sense is signified rest and peace, because when the Lord united His Human to the Divine Itself He had peace, for the combats then ceased, and all things in the heavens and in the hells had been reduced into order. And accordingly there was peace not for Him only; but also for the angels in the heavens, and for men on earth, there were peace and salvation. Secrets of Heaven, NCE

Message

The Soul's Sabbath, Part 1

I really resented having to spend ten days at the Shalem Institute in Maryland. I had a busy life, with a full-time job as an Associate Professor at the Swedenborg School of Religion. But I had signed up for the two-year program in Spiritual Guidance at the



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Shalem Institute. Most of the program we could do from our homes, but we had to spend ten days each year at the Shalem Institute.

Quickly I became engaged in the rhythm of the days, filled with lectures, small groups, and personal reflection time. I wasn't sure what to expect on the week-end, however, when we were told we would have a Sabbath quiet time, led by the Rev. Tilden Edwards.

It began Friday evening and was to continue until Monday morning. It was to be a time of silence, but not a time alone. We had specific times to gather for readings, inspiration, music, and movement. The instructions were simple: we were let God guide us in how to use this time. Before we began, Tilden talked to us about the importance of "Sabbath time" in our busy lives. He said:

Buried deep in Jewish and Christian traditions we find this rhythm of time anchored in the sabbath. Sabbath time at its heart is an opportunity for special practice of unambiguous receptivity to the free gift of life in God. This practice is meant to both balance and ground our working time. It needs to be recovered and offered in fresh forms today. ...

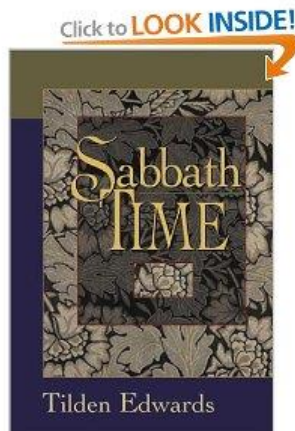


Love in the triune God is open, connecting, freeing, playful, and painful, transforming. Its two faces are labor and rest, ministry and Sabbath.

A rhythm of sabbath and ministry time is a foundational discipline, a framework for all our disciplines. It is a rhythm that God provides to human life for its care, cleansing, and opening to grace. This rhythm is not for one day or one week or one year only. It is for life. [quoted from his book, Sabbath Time by Tilden Edwards]

I was thoughtful about his words. As a minister, Sunday is an important day of worship, in which I often lead worship for other people. I hadn't really thought about how I bring Sabbath renewal into my own life.

Those two and a half days were transformational for me. Freed of phone calls and email and conversation, I found myself immersed deeply into the loving mystery of the Divine. Something inside of me became liberated, and I felt my spirit soar with the wind. At the end of the time, I was more refreshed than I could ever remember being. It wasn't the relaxation I normally feel on a vacation, when I do fun activities or rest on the beach with a novel. This Sabbath time was a complete renewal of my soul.



I re-read Tilden's book from 1992: *Sabbath Time*, and was reminded of the history of "Sabbath." Of course, the 4th Commandment is at the heart of the concept in Jewish and Christian traditions:

8–11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...

In the Jewish tradition, the seventh day of the week was Saturday, and the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday and went until sundown on Saturday.

In the Christian tradition, the Lord's resurrection was seen to be the day after the Sabbath – or Sunday. Sunday evolved in the Christian tradition as "The Lord's Day," a day to honor and worship the Lord and his resurrection.

This was sometimes seen as "The First Day" as opposed to "the seventh day" of the week. In some traditions, Sunday became both the eighth day and the first day.

Some say the Sabbath always has been and always will be the seventh day, which is Saturday. Sunday is "The Lord's Day," but not the Sabbath.

Others say that Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath, but Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

Then I read on-line that some group called ISO – International Organization for Standardization decreed in 1988 that Monday was the first day of the week, making Sunday the 7th day!

For Swedenborg, of course, the concept of "Sabbath" was not so much a particular day, as it was a correspondence for the highest level of regeneration:

87 A further reason a heavenly person is identified as Sabbath rest is the fact that struggle ends when a person becomes heavenly. Evil spirits retreat and good ones

move closer. Heavenly angels approach too, and when they are nearby, evil spirits, unable to be anywhere near, escape far away. Because we have done none of the fighting ourselves—the Lord does all the fighting for us—he is the one said to rest. [Secrets of Heaven.]

Tilden Edwards looks at “Sabbath” as not so much a particular day of the week, but rather a quality of living our lives that we should incorporate into every day.

I particularly like what Edwards says in his book:

Harvey Cox notes that the Hebrew word for God’s resting used in the fourth commandment literally means ‘to catch one’s breath.’ He suggests that God and people are essentially meant to do nothing but ‘breathe’ during this time, as a source of renewal. In this way Sabbath connects with certain Asian contemplative practices of just sitting and attentively breathing, as well as with historical Christian practices.” [Edwards, p. 59 from Harvey Cox, Turning East, Chapter 5 ‘Meditation and Sabbath.]

These ties in with the Shalem Institute’s approach to “contemplative spirituality.”



In an article, the staff writes:

In many traditions, the word "spirit" refers to life-force, the basic energy of being. .. Traditionally, this life force is seen as manifest in our love--in the passions and inspirations that motivate us and connect us with the world and with one another. Although the spiritual life may take many forms, it is always and foremost about love. Perhaps the most profound and pure experience of this love occurs in what the traditions refer to as contemplation. ...

A simple definition of contemplation is "loving presence to what is."In this sense, contemplation is an all-embracing quality of presence, including not only our own inner experience but also directly perceiving and responding to the situation and needs of the world around us. Rather than trying to balance contemplation and action, it is more accurate to see contemplation in action, undergirding and embracing everything. In this way, all our thoughts and actions can be joined together in prayerful openness and loving responsiveness.

[What Is Contemplative Spirituality, A Shalem Senior Staff Monograph.]

A Sabbath time of resting in God’s presence is perfect for a contemplative approach to spirituality. In this approach, we are not trying to do a particular meditative practice or spiritual discipline. We simply are “being” with God in the world. Or as Swedenborg would say, we are opening our hearts to the inflow of Divine Love.

When do you have Sabbath time for your soul in your life? When can you build in quiet times of awareness of God's presence?

It can be any day of the week, or any part of any day. Whenever it occurs, it is your soul's Sabbath.

Let us pray.



Dear Lord of Hosts who is the supreme one of our lives, guide us in the way to be with you. Help us to become quiet in our lives and minds so that we may sit with you in communion. Lets us be the conduits for your living water that comes to all as a blessing for this day and all the days of our lives. Thank you, God, for the flow of love, comfort, enthusiasm, clarity, and peace you give us in your living water. Your Blessings abound. AMEN.

Rev. Judith



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The Soul's Sabbath, Part 2

August 11, 2013

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 20:11, New International Version (NIV)

11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

From Swedenborg

[2] By the "Sabbath" in its proper sense is signified rest and peace, because when the Lord united His Human to the Divine Himself He had peace, for the combats then ceased, and all things in the heavens and in the hells had been reduced into order. And accordingly there was peace not for Him only; but also for the angels in the heavens, and for men on earth, there were peace and salvation. Secrets of Heaven, #10730 NCE

Message

Swedenborg and the Sabbath

The Soul's Sabbath, Part 2

What day of the week do you consider "the Sabbath"? How do you usually spend that day in a typical week? We explored some of those questions in [last week's sermon](#).

Tilden Edwards, Episcopal priest and co-founder of the Shalem Institute wrote:

A rhythm of sabbath and ministry time is a foundational discipline, a framework for all our disciplines. It is a rhythm that God provides to human life for its care, cleansing, and opening to grace. This rhythm is not for one day or one week or one year only. It is for life. [quoted from his book, Sabbath Time by Tilden Edwards]

Edwards sees our lives as needing balance between "ministry" and "Sabbath." Ministry times are when we are working in the world in a useful way; what Emanuel Swedenborg called "uses." Many of us spend much of our time working in our jobs, attending to our families, participating in volunteer activities, and the many tasks that take up daily life. Many of us live with "to do" lists ever at the forefront of every day. Then, sometimes, we take a vacation. Often that involves hectic travel to some destination where we stand in long lines to participate in some activity!

Our focus during August this year is on rest and renewal – not just for the body, but also the soul.

To give renewal to the soul, we need something much deeper than the usual vacation. We

need “Sabbath time” – in the original meaning of that term.

There are many meanings to the word “Sabbath.” In the Jewish and many other traditions, it refers to Saturday, the 7th day of the week, as a day to honor the commandment:

8 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20, New International version

Most Christians [excluding 7th Day Adventists] make Sunday “The Lord’s Day” in honor of his resurrection, believed to have been on a Sunday. For some Christians, Sunday is the “Christian Sabbath” – on the 1st day of the week. Some consider it both the 8th and 1st day.

There is also one perspective that actually Monday is the first day of week, so Sunday is the 7th Day.

For Swedenborg, of course, the actual day of the week was less important than its meaning.

For him, the Sabbath was the 7th day and it represented a person in the heavenly state of regeneration. In *Heavenly Secrets* he put forth seven stages of regeneration – each one corresponding to the 7 days of creation. [In later works, he condensed it into 3 stages: *Repentance, reformation, and regeneration.*]

Here is a chart of his seven stages of regeneration. For a pdf version, [CLICK HERE](#).

	SWEDENBORG’S REGENERATION – 7 stages	7 days of Creation	7 Chakras
1	Void <i>1st glimmerings that there is a “spirit” on the face of the water; soil before seeds planted; no ray of light shining; spiritual devastation</i>	light	Red - Focus on grounding of self
2	Remnants of Divine <i>Separation between inner and outer self. Inner self has good feelings and true ideas. It is “heaven.”</i>	heavens	Orange - relationships
3	Repentance Do inner kindness but not from spirit	earth and plants	Yellow – repentance; doing good works
4	Loving Works Love and faith begin – 2 lights	Day, night, stars	Green, love
5	Truthful Speaking Speak with conviction. Really start to live	fish, birds	Blue; self-expression
6	Spiritual Person Act with conviction and love... Find pleasure in acts of kindness. We become spiritual. Inner battle between love and selfishness still exist, but love always wins	Wild animals, humans	Purple – creativity
7	Heavenly Person Live by love inside and out. End of inner conflict	God rests	White -- union

In Swedenborg's seven-stage process, the 7th step is a time when we really come into oneness with the Divine. This, for Swedenborg, is where our spiritual path is leading us – into the Divine Human – where Divine and human become united [yet still distinct in their differences.]

84 Genesis 2:2, 3. And on the seventh day God completed the work that he had done; and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and consecrated it, because on it he rested from all the work that he had done as God in creating it. A heavenly person is the seventh day. And since the Lord worked through six days, that individual is called his work. Conflict then comes to an end, as a result of which the Lord is said to rest from all his work. This is why the seventh day was consecrated and named "Sabbath," from [a Hebrew word for] rest. In the process the human being has been made, formed, and created, as the words themselves clearly indicate.

Swedenborg says the Sabbath is about the Lord:

In regard to the seventh day, evidence that a heavenly person is the seventh day or Sabbath can be found in the identity of the Lord himself as the Sabbath. As he says, "The Son of Humankind is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28), meaning that the Lord is the true human being and the Sabbath itself. He calls his kingdom in the heavens [85]

People in this state of regeneration live in peace:

Heavenly people act not on their own desire but on the Lord's pleasure, which is his desire. So they are blessed with inner peace and happiness (their being "lifted up on the heights of the earth") and at the same time with outer calm and enjoyment (their being "fed with Jacob's inheritance"). 86 When spiritual people (who are now the "sixth day") begin to turn heavenly (a process first alluded to here); they have reached the eve of the Sabbath. In the Jewish religion, this was represented by the commencement of the Sabbath observance in the evening. Heavenly people are the morning, soon to be described.

An important aspect of this stage is that we stop struggling. All through the stages of regeneration we have had struggles between good and evil. Good has often won because we pushed ourselves to do the "right thing" even when we didn't want to. However, at this point we don't have to struggle. We do good because we want to! Up to then, we have fought our inner impulses to be selfish or lazy. But, now all of our inner impulses lead us to not just doing good, but feeling like doing good inside.

87 A further reason a heavenly person is identified as Sabbath rest is the fact that struggle ends when a person becomes heavenly. Evil spirits retreat and good ones move closer. Heavenly angels approach too, and when they are nearby, evil spirits, unable to be anywhere near, escape far away. Because we have done none of the fighting ourselves—the Lord does all the fighting for us—he is the one said to rest.

It is interesting that actually it is the Lord who needs to rest, because he has been fighting for us to get to this point!

You can see from the chart how we move from spiritual to heavenly when we go from day/step

6 to day/step 7.

91 For one who knows nothing of the conditions a person experiences when changing from spiritual to heavenly, however, the ramifications of all this are impossible to understand, since they are fairly deep mysteries. When we are spiritual, our outer self is not yet willing to obey and serve the inner self, which causes strife. When we become heavenly, then our outer self starts to obey and serve the inner, which brings an end to strife and the beginning of calm (see §87). The rain and mist symbolize this calm, because it acts like a mist, coming from our inner self to water and drench the outer self. Such calm, which comes of peace, causes the growth of the “shrub of the field” and the “plant of the field”—specifically, rational ideas and factual knowledge having an origin that is heavenly and spiritual at the same time. 92 None but those who have experienced a state of peace can appreciate the nature of the peaceful tranquility that the outer self enjoys when there is an end to struggle, or to the disquiet of burning desires and misconceptions. That state is so joyful that it surpasses all our notions of joy. It is not simply an end to our struggles but a vibrancy welling up from deep-seated peace, affecting our outer being beyond the capacity of words to describe it. That state gives birth to religious truth and a loving goodness, which draw their life from the joy of peace.

He also talks about the importance of the number 7:

716 The symbolism of seven each as things that are holy can be seen from what was said about the seventh or Sabbath day above at §§84–87. Those sections say that the Lord is the seventh day and that from him comes the entire heavenly church, or the heavenly person, and in fact the heavenly quality itself, which, because it belongs to the Lord alone, is very sacred. In the Word, accordingly, seven symbolizes holiness.

So what does “Sabbath” mean to Swedenborg? It seems to mean to him something similar to how Tilden Edwards talks about it. It is a deep, spiritual time for renewal of our soul as we remember our connection with the Divine.

I can't help but ponder, however, just which day Swedenborg had in mind when he wrote about the “Sabbath.” He wrote about it as the 7th day of Creation. So which day was the 7th? If Sunday was the 7th day, then the first day of creation was Monday. In the Jewish – and many other -- traditions, the first day of creation was Sunday, and the 7th, or Sabbath Day, was Saturday.

To try to understand how Swedenborg thought of the specific days in creation, I emailed our eminent Swedenborgian scholar, Rev. Dr. George Dole. He took time out from his week at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly to write me this:

As for worship on Sundays, I'm pretty sure this was prompted by the fact that the resurrection took place on "the first day of the week"(Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:1, John 20:19). I don't believe that has been retrojected into the creation story. Living as we do across the street from a Seventh Day Adventist church, I get weekly reminders of the fact that there are loyal Christian Sabbatarians.

So, I think that Dole is saying that, as far as we know, Swedenborg did not address the issue of

whether the Sabbath, the 7th day, was Saturday or Sunday.

But, then, as noted earlier, that detail was not particularly important to Swedenborg. His focus was not on outer details, but rather inner meanings. In all probability, Swedenborg and Edwards are saying the same thing: "Sabbath time" is not about a particular day of the week, or about attending a corporate worship service. It IS about each of us finding the way we can feel renewed in God's presence and love.

Even though we can't live every moment in a state of tranquil peace, we can feel that state now and then. That reminder can be a brief "God break" in the middle of the day, when we breathe deeply, let go of our worries, and just remember our oneness with the Divine. It can be a reminder that although we often struggle inside ourselves, we are moving towards a time when our inner and outer selves will be in harmony; living in peace with the Divine. And -- just for a brief moment -- we can be in the space -- that space that is to be our future, was our past, and is actually also our present -- although we forget that.

What helps you remember that your soul resides in deep peace with the Divine? Music? A walk in nature? Art? Meditation? Worship?

Whatever it is, Swedenborg would call that an honoring of the "Sabbath"; and being a time of true worship.

Let us pray.



Dear Jesus, our Lord,

As we walk the road of service to you, help us to be compassionate with others and ourselves. Show us where we are marginalizing others in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Help us to know when we are into our own self will, and help us to do your will instead. When we falter, help us to have the courage to keep going. When we forget that you are the power and value, in all things, teach us that in "finding Thee first, we will find everything else in Thee". Let us be grateful for all we have been given. Thank you, Lord, for your love and guidance throughout our lives. Amen.

Rev. Judith Vandergrift

Dancing With God

August 18, 2013

READINGS

From the Bible

Exodus 15

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 Swedenborg

8336. Verses 20, 21 *And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam responded to them, Sing to Jehovah, for He has highly exalted [Himself]; the horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea. 'And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand' means ascribing glory to the Lord from the good of faith. 'And all the women went out after her' means every good of truth. 'With timbrels and with dances' means praise from joy and gladness. 'And responded to them' means a reciprocation. 'Sing to Jehovah' means that glory belongs to the Lord alone. 'For He has highly exalted [Himself]' means that He has displayed His Divinity within His Humanity. 'The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea' means that as a result simply of His presence falsities in faith and evils in life cast themselves into hell.*

Message

Dancing With God

I loved my times of study and retreat at the Shalem Institute. We would always have a few days of Sabbath time with God when we didn't speak to each other. That doesn't mean, however, that we did not dance and sing. The Rev. Tilden Edwards would put on music and encourage us to move – all as part of our prayer with the Divine.

Are music and movement part of your worship? As we explore how to rejuvenate the soul, let's consider how music can awaken your soul -- into singing and dancing with God!

Dancing has always been a form of worship in some religious traditions. In today's reading from the Bible, we are reminded that after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Miriam spontaneously took a tambourine; singing and dancing as the women followed.

Swedenborg talked of the life in heaven as filled with music, concerts, and singing. He said



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that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. Music can be an experience of wholeness and connection: with each other and with God. When we share music, we may be singing [sharing sacred breath together], listening [using our ears and hearing to connect with our emotions], and moving our whole body with the music. Our body itself becomes an instrument to connect with the Divine.

We can experience God and share Divine Love in many ways through the use of music. Consider all of these form of worship through music:

Listening to music
writing music
playing music
incorporating music into other arts
singing
dancing

Moving to music
Moving without music

When you write music, play an instrument, sing or dance for others -- you are helping others experience the Divine.

When you sing or dance with others, you are sharing the Divine together. Playing instruments, singing, and dancing together all involve ways of finding a common wholeness in God.

You can have private time with God through your dancing and singing. Dance with God!

Below, you will see some additional passages from Scripture and writings from Swedenborg on dance and music. In between, there are some YouTube videos that celebrate dance and music as ways of connecting with God.

Feel free to enjoy any or all of these videos. Or, if you prefer, go for a walk or do some exercises or sing a song or play an instrument. Allow your soul to be refreshed in music and movement.

II Samuel 6:14 NIV

14 David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might.

15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 83398339. 'With timbrels and with dances' means praise from joy and gladness. This is clear from the meaning of 'timbrel' as that which has regard to an affection for spiritual good, or to the good of truth, and means the delight or joy belonging to it, dealt with just above in 8337; and from 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 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 ...

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 276

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 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).

Psalm 98

A psalm.

1 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.

2 The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

3 He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

4 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

5 make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,

6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.



7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;

9 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.

Let us pray.



Dear Lord, we lift our voices in praise of you, singing to your glory! What a gift to our ears, minds and hearts you have given us through music and the sound of life. Thank you. May we use our voices to add to the joy and peace of this world through the words we use and the tone of our voices. Help us to be ever mindful of the gifts of voice and hearing. Let us be thankful for the music of your world God. AMEN.

Love, Rev. Judith.



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

Contentment With God's Gifts

August 25, 2013

READINGS

From the Bible

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

“And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. 5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

7 “The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. 8 The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and he will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. 9 The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways. 10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of you. 11 And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open to you his good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. 13 And the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward; if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, 14 and if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius[a] a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. 5 Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’



7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8 And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' 9 And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, 12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'^[b] 16 So the last will be first, and the first last."

Message
Contentment with God's Gifts
by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

This morning I would like to consider God's providence in our lives in this world. Specifically, I want to reflect on differing views of prosperity. In our reading from Deuteronomy, God promises all kinds of good things for those who follow His laws. I didn't read the part about the curses that would descend upon the individual who does not follow God's laws. But we have a conflicting voice from Psalm 37. There we find that evil people flourish and come into wealth. We read about "the wealth of many wicked" and a "wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree". Our New Testament passage brings up a related idea, but different in some respects. It talks about laborers who begin work at the beginning of the day, the middle of the day, and as the day ends. They are all paid the same. Those who started work at the beginning of the day complained that they got the same pay as those who had worked only an hour. What I take from these passages is that problems can arise when we look at the life of other people in relation to ourselves.

We can wonder about God's providence when we see people succeed by deceit. Or we can question why some people have advanced beyond us when we have apparently put in the same amount of work, or appear to have the same credentials. This would be like the laborers who began at the beginning of the day who got paid the same as others who worked only an hour. These issues arise only when we see life from the world's point of view. Swedenborg calls this a materialistic point of view.

Since materialists call the pleasures of self-love good . . . and convince themselves that they are good, they call rank and money divine blessings. However, when materialists see that just as many evil as good people are raised to high rank and advanced in wealth, and even more when they see good people living in disgrace and poverty and evil people living in splendor and wealth, they think to themselves, "What is going on here? This cannot be the work of divine providence, because if it were managing everything, it would supply the good with high rank and money and humble the evil with

poverty and disgrace" (DP 216).

This way of looking at things is like our reading from Deuteronomy. It is a rather simplistic theology that says God rewards the good with material things. It is also a materialistic way of looking at things as it only looks at success from a worldly point of view. Those who view things this way, as Swedenborg puts it, "call rank and money divine blessings."

But there are other blessings. Money, rank, power, and prestige last only as long as life in this world lasts. God cares about the things that last forever. Swedenborg teaches that, "Divine blessing is to be happy to eternity, and that the Lord regards such things as are of brief duration, as are the things of this world relatively, no otherwise than as means to eternal things" (AC 8717). God regards our wealth and status only as it relates to our eternal welfare. He gives wealth and status to those it will not harm.

Wherefore also the Lord provides for the good, who receive His mercy in time, such things as conduce to the happiness of their eternal life, riches and honors to whom they are not hurtful, and no riches and honors to whom they would be hurtful. Nevertheless, to these latter He gives in time, in the place of honors and riches, to be joyful with a few things, and to be more content than the rich and honored (AC 8717).

It is not bad to have wealth and status. I gave someone the impression a while ago that riches were bad. But wealth can be used for good as well as for evil. And good can come from wealth even in the hands of bad people. What matters is why and how a person uses wealth.

The reason both evil and good people are elevated to high rank and advanced in wealth is that both evil and good people do worthwhile things, Though the evil are doing them for the sake of their personal worth and for the benefit of their image, while the good are doing them for the sake of the worth and benefit of the actions themselves (DP 217).

When Swedenborg talks about the good doing worthwhile things for the benefit of the actions themselves, I think he is talking about people who want to make a difference in the world. When we look at politicians, it is easy to get cynical. It seems that getting into office is the only thing that so many politicians strive for. But I think that there are some politicians who truly want to use their power to make the world better. I have my own ideas of who some of these politicians might be, but I don't want to include political commentary in this talk. I think we can all think of leaders and also persons of great wealth who are making the world better--or at least trying to. Bill Gates amassed great wealth by being in the right place at the right time. He had a love for computers when society was moving toward everyone owning a personal computer. Had he been born 50 years earlier, or 50 years later, he wouldn't have amassed such a great fortune. But it was a wonderful gift to the world when he retired and set up his foundation. I can't comment on whether Bill Gates is spiritually good or bad. But we can see that God allowed him his great wealth because God knew that Bill Gates would do good with it.

It's too bad that society didn't decide to move toward a hunger for Swedenborg



about the time I was ordained. Then I would have been able to ride the crest and come into great wealth. But society didn't move in that direction. I have made my life's choice and I am very happy with it. Trouble only comes when we look at others around us. Even in the realm of religions, we look around us and see mega-churches that preach fundamentalist doctrines flourishing. It is not our place to compare ourselves with them. We have made our choice to this belief system, and we need to be contented with our choice and with this church.

The secret to eternal happiness is contentment with what we have. God knows our needs and God provides. While I watched my friends finding university positions while I didn't, I was downcast. But God led me here to Edmonton ministering in a beautiful faith with a beautiful congregation. I'm happier now than I ever have been in my life, personally and professionally. I don't think I would have been this happy in a university. I know this, because last fall I attended an academic conference in Montreal. I listened to a lot of academic speeches from brilliant scholars, but left feeling empty. Religion is my calling, and the love I feel for my work today doesn't compare with the intellectual world of academia. The secret is contentment with the choices we have made and trust that God is leading us to what is best for ourselves. In heaven, the angels,

live content with what they have, whether it be little or much, because they know that they receive as much as is useful--little if little is good for them and much if much is good for them. So they have no anxiety about the future, but refer to anxiety about the future as "care for the morrow," which they say is pain at losing or not getting things that are not needed for their life's useful activities (HH 278).

How much do you need to be happy? What things do you need to be happy? These are questions we all think about from time to time. But our real questions should be, "What do I need for eternal blessedness? How can I come near to the God who loves me? What do I need for eternal life?" These are the things that God cares about. The things of this world are short lived. We will leave them all behind when we transition into the eternal world. Love and wisdom, care for our neighbors, a heartfelt connection with God, a clean conscience--these are what live forever. These are the gifts God will provide for all who ask. And if we have these things, we will find the peace and contentment of the angels.

Let us pray.



Dear Lord, our life director,
Help us to take a step of faith into "Trust" today to trust you with this day as our guide and mentor. Keep our hearts and minds only on your Grace and Love for us. Give our souls deep rest today. Help us to live in, divine contentment no matter what is happening around us. Let us have your Peace that passeth all understanding.
Thank you, God, thank you. AMEN.

Love, Rev. Judith

September 1, 2013

READINGS
From the Bible

Genesis 1; NIV

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."

7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

13 And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.

And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23 And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the



ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”
And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

From Swedenborg

TO understand what divine providence is—that it is the way the Lord’s divine love and wisdom govern us—it is important to be aware of the following things, which were presented in my book on the subject. In the Lord, divine love is a property of divine wisdom and divine wisdom is a property of divine love (Divine Love and Wisdom 34–39). Divine love and wisdom cannot fail to be and to be manifested in others that it has created (§§47–51). Everything in the universe was created by divine love and wisdom (§§52, 53, 151–156). Everything in the created universe is a vessel of divine love and wisdom (§§54–60 [55–60]). The Lord looks like the sun to angels; its radiating warmth is love and its radiating light is wisdom (§§83–88, 89–92, 93–98, 296–301). The divine love and wisdom that emanate from the Lord constitute a single whole (§§99–102). The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, created the universe and everything in it from himself and not from nothing (§§282–284, 290–295). These propositions may be found in the work entitled *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Love and Wisdom*. Further, if we put these propositions together with what I said about creation in that work, it shows that the way the Lord’s divine love and wisdom look after us is what we call divine providence. However, since that book was about creation and not about how the state of things was maintained after creation (which is the way the Lord is looking after us), I need to deal with that now. Divine Providence, #1 and part of #2

Message

JOHNNY APPLESEED AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

PART #1



Was Johnny Appleseed a real man or made-up myth? How about Daniel Boone? Paul Bunyan? Davy Crockett? Howard Means did a survey on those questions for his book: *Johnny Appleseed: The Man, The Myth, the American Story*. 2500 adult Americans were surveyed, and this is the result:

Of Boone and Crockett, there was little doubt: Roughly 92 percent of those surveyed were sure both men were real figures. Paul Bunyan of the blue ox and mighty ax caused more confusion: 80 percent thought he never existed, 10 percent said he did, and another 10 percent were unsure. Johnny Appleseed, though, walked a middle line: 58 percent said he was an actual historical figure, while 42 percent said either he never existed (29 percent) or they weren't sure if he had (13 percent).

[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). *Johnny Appleseed* (p. 6). Simon & Schuster, Inc. Kindle Edition.]

Johnny was, of course, an actual historical figure. [Boone and Crockett were, too. I don't think Bunyan was.] Survey respondents, however, did not know much about Johnny – including when he lived, that his work was primarily in Ohio, and that he was a Swedenborgian.

Author William Kerrigan points out in his book: *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard: A Cultural History*; that the stories of Boone and Crockett – and Mike Fink – were masculine and aggressive. However, the stories of Johnny were about feminine traits. *Among the most powerful disseminators of these legends was the Walt Disney Company, which seized on the westward expansion story to target a new audience of baby boomer children. ... Mike Fink, Davy Crockett, and Daniel Boone were archetypes of American manhood, and even in the Disney versions, violence was nearly always central to their stories. Disney also added the thoroughly mythical Paul Bunyan to this cast and celebrated him for his prowess felling whole forests of trees. Johnny Appleseed, in sharp contrast, devoted his life to planting them. If Crockett's war against the Red Stick Creeks explained American military involvement in Korea, Apple-seed's unbounded benevolence was a metaphor for another approach to the same danger, manifested in American aid programs and organizations like the Peace Corps.*

Johnny lived his life during important periods of history. He was born two years before the Revolutionary War [and two years after the death of Emanuel Swedenborg.]

Kerrigan writes: *He died in Fort Wayne, Indiana, less than a year after Samuel Morse transmitted the biblical query "What hath God wrought?" along a telegraph line, signaling the birth of modern communications.*

[Kerrigan, William (2012-10-10). *Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard* (Kindle Locations 152-154). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.]

CHILDHOOD

Johnny Chapman was born in Leominster, Massachusetts, on September 26, 1774, to Elizabeth and Nathaniel Chapman. He had an older sister named "Elizabeth" and they named their son "John." Less than a year later, he was baptized in the local Congregational Church. His father had joined the local Minutemen militia, and he was called to the revolutionary war months after John's birth. When John was two, his mother died, so John and his sister were raised by relatives until the summer of 1780, when their father was discharged from the Army.



The story in the family is that they were cared for by their maternal grandparents. Nathaniel's parents had passed away, and he had no other family in town. However, Elizabeth's parents were located near-by. Johnny probably spent his early years on their farms and orchards.

After leaving the army, Nathaniel married Lucy Cooley of Longmeadow, Massachusetts. She was only eighteen and belonged to a local prominent family. She had inherited some property from her father, which became Nathaniel's after marriage. They had 34 acres and a small house a few blocks off the Longmeadow main street. It included 7 tilled acres, 3 meadow acres, and 10 of woodland; plus 14 considered not able to be improved.

A year after their marriage, John had a new brother: Nathaniel. Lucy had 9 more children over the next 22 years. John and Nathaniel were very close, and stayed so throughout their lives.

Howard Means suggests that Elizabeth and John, the children of Elizabeth, may have had a difficult time adjusting to life in a small house with their step-mother and ten new siblings.

If local lore is right, they moved into a small, plain, rectangular frame home that dates back to at least 1695. For the four of them— two children, then ten and not quite six, freshly reacquired father, and new stepmother— the house certainly would have been satisfactory, and clearly there were opportunities for schooling in Longmeadow, quite possibly for Elizabeth to continue hers and for John to start his. But one guesses that what Elizabeth and John were most likely to have recalled in later life about their growing years in Longmeadow were the agonies of childbirth, the constant bawling of children, and the ever-diminishing personal space in their living quarters.

[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). Johnny Appleseed (Kindle Locations 481-483). Simon & Schuster, Inc... Kindle Edition.]

CHILDHOOD RELIGION

John and his family were members of the local Congregational Church. The church was rather conservative, and did not tolerate dissent. Social hierarchy was considered part of God's plan. The minister, Rev. Stephen Williams, was conservative and was not a supporter of the Revolution.

LEAVING HOME

Times were difficult financially, and eventually John's father and step-mother lost ownership of their property. They couldn't afford the taxes, so sold the farm to a wealthy neighbor, Nathaniel Ely, Jr., in 1785 for thirty dollars. Ely allowed the Chapman's to stay, but as renters. John turned 11 that year, and probably shared in the sense of shame his father must have felt about losing his farm. John would not inherit land, and would probably have to move elsewhere to find his place in the post-revolutionary America.

By 1790, the year John turned sixteen, he was no longer living with his father and step-mother. It is possible that this father apprenticed him in a skill. Or, he could have been sent back to live with and work for Leominster relatives. Elizabeth, just turning 18, was also not listed with the household that year. A few years later she married a man from Leominster.

It seems that John was living on his own at a young age. He may have felt the need to move west to find better opportunity. Kerrigan says: *By the end of the eighteenth century, the valley offered few opportunities for the eldest son of a poor family. Land was scarce and expensive,*

and John could not expect to inherit a farm from his landless father.

When John was 18 [in 1792], he felt a strong yearning to “go west”, and persuaded his half-brother Nathaniel to join him in the adventure. Johnny and his little brother Nathaniel set out in mid to late November. It was risky to leave so close to winter, and perhaps his was waiting for the end of the cider-making season. He used the cider mills to get the apple seeds he carried.

He took on the profession of “nurseryman.” Howard Means says:

It was a good time for nurserymen, too. One strain of the many folk traditions that fill in Chapman’s early years has him working as a boy in Longmeadow for a local apple grower. In truth, no one knows for certain where Chapman learned the orchard skills that would eventually ripen into the name and myth of Johnny Appleseed, but however he came about his learning, the Ohio frontier at the start of the new century was an ideal place to exercise it. Apples were a vital diet supplement— whether dried for winter or pressed and fermented into applejack and hard cider, the essential beverages of early American life, just as cider vinegar was the essential medicine. Almost as important, fruit trees were also a frequent legal stipulation of land ownership.

[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). Johnny Appleseed (p. 8). Simon & Schuster, Inc. Kindle Edition.]

It was a good time to be a nurseryman.

Beginning in 1792, the Ohio Company of Associates (formed, despite its name, in Massachusetts) offered one hundred acres free to anyone willing to settle in the “Donation Tract,” a hundred thousand acres of wilderness beyond Ohio’s first permanent white settlement, at Marietta, that Congress had given the company to create a buffer zone with still-warring Indian tribes. The only requirement: Settlers had three years to plant fifty apple trees and twenty peach trees.

Johnny was able to get apple seeds for free every fall behind the cider mills. There ...*One can find a pile of discarded pomace, the pressed, seed-filled pulp that constituted the waste product of cider-making. This offal had little value, beyond as hog feed, but John understood that the seeds it contained would have more value in new settlements across the mountains. It is hard to imagine a cider mill owner turning down a request from a poor young man seeking to recover seeds from this waste pile.*

SEEDS VS GRAFTS

Kerrigan explains why Johnny’s apple seeds were so important and unique. He says that the origins of the apple tree are in central Asia, perhaps in the mountains of Kazakhstan.

Gather one hundred seeds from a favorite apple variety and plant them, and the trees that grow will produce fruit with dramatically varied characteristics, most quite different from the parent apple tree and most unpalatable for fresh eating. Planting apple trees from seed is entering a genetic lottery, but every so often this lottery produces a winner, a fruit of exceptional qualities worth propagating. Many popular apple varieties today were the happy accidents of seedling trees. The simplest way to propagate a specific apple variety is through grafting— attaching a twig or branch of the favored variety to the rootstock or a branch of another apple tree. The fruit that grows beyond that graft is essentially a clone of the fruit on the tree from which it came.



Grafting had been used for years in Europe, producing a great variety of many types of apples. The Native Americans, however, were known for gathering wild fruit. When they did grow apples, they did it from seeds; not from grafting.

When white settlers came to the New World, they couldn't afford grafted apple trees.

Shipping grafted fruit stock of favorite English varieties took up valuable cargo space, and keeping that stock alive on a long sea journey was difficult. As a result, any grafted stock arriving from England would fetch a high price.

Also, the settlers didn't have the time to graft expensive apple trees. When they did use grafts from England, those trees often did not survive the harsher New World climate. Planting seeds was a chance to see which seeds were hardy enough to survive the climate. The survival of the trees was more important than the number of apples they yielded.

Kerrigan points out that our hero was known as "Johnny Apple SEED"; not "Johnny Apple TREE." The fact that he brought apple seeds – not graftings – was highly significant. He was spreading the poor person's way of growing apples – not the fancy and expensive methods of Europe. Additionally he was teaching white people the way the Native Americans grew their apples; a way designed for survival in the harsh New World.

Poor settlers grew seed apples to feed their families. Later, as some became more prosperous, they grew grafted trees for selling trees in the market as a way of producing income.

Johnny was a hero for the poor settler, who was just striving to survive in the New World. He taught white people the ways of Native Americans. Understanding the cultural meaning of seedling and grafted apple trees in the early nineteenth century is critical to understanding who John Chapman was and how he was received in the communities in which he lived. John Chapman provided seedling trees to the poor. Kerrigan writes: *While the missionaries were trying to persuade the Seneca to live like white people, John Chapman and many of the other whites in the vicinity of Burnt House were surviving by living like Seneca... An environmental transformation, which would be ushered in by deforestation, needed to occur before the lifestyle of the self-provisioning farmer was possible. Even then, given the limits of the land, the profits would fall only to a few.*

Author William Kerrigan came to our 2013 annual Swedenborgian convention in July to speak about Johnny from his research for the book. He pointed out that Johnny was a radical figure of his time, who championed a way of growing apples that ensured survival. He stood against those who strove to make a profit off the New World – a profit that involved the environmental destruction of acres of forest land.

We don't know whether Johnny thought in terms of the environmental, economic, cultural, and social implications of growing apples from seed rather than grafts. However, we know that Divine Providence knew all of this, and D.P. was guiding Johnny.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND JOHNNY APPLESEED

In Divine Providence #2, Swedenborg says:

...the way the Lord's divine love and wisdom look after us is what we call divine providence.

How did the Lord look after Johnny?

We can look at Johnny's early life to see many examples of Divine Providence at work. Although his mother died after his birth --while his father was away at war -- there were loving relatives able to take in Johnny and his sister Elizabeth. Later his father re-married bringing an understanding step-mother into his life.

This new marriage brought Johnny a younger brother, Nathaniel, who became a close companion and confident who went with Johnny when he left home to go West.

As we move further into Chapman's life, we'll see more ways that the Lord "looked after" him.

However, a larger question of Divine Providence is: how did the Lord use John Chapman to help the needs of others? We can see how John was called by the Lord into the wilderness, to make a profound difference in the lives of many.

Next week, we'll look more deeply at Divine Providence in Johnny's life as we consider how he found Swedenborg, and how his life was impacted by the theology he discovered.

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.

Johnny Appleseed and Divine Providence, Part 2

September 8, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Mark 4:1-9, 26-29 (New Living Translation)

1 Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. 2 He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

3 “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. 4 As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. 5 Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. 6 But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. 7 Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. 8 Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” 9 Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

26 Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. 28 The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. 29 And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion #586

586. That people can only be regenerated gradually, may be illustrated by each and all things that come into existence in the natural world. A tree cannot reach its full growth in a day, but there is first growth from the seed, then from the root, and then from the shoot, which becomes the trunk, and from this go forth branches and leaves, and finally blossoms and fruit. Wheat or barley does not ripen for the harvest in a day; a house is not built in a day, nor does a person acquire their full stature in a day, still less their wisdom...

Message

Johnny Appleseed and Divine Providence, Part 2

The leaves are just starting to turn in Maine. I’ve enjoyed the opportunity to show parts of my state to a special houseguest: Rev. Mary Duckworth, visiting from England. She is here for the Gathering Leaves conference of Swedenborgian women from all the church branches.

We have seen the early fall apples on sale by local farmers, and found the first of the season’s apple cider. Apple cider is quite similar to apple juice, but often thicker without particles being

filtered. What remains after the juice is pressed out is called “pomace.” It includes the skin, pulp, seeds, and stem.

Johnny Appleseed got his seeds by rummaging through this “pomace” from cider mills, and then used the seeds to start nurseries of apple trees to give and sell to settlers.

September is Johnny Appleseed month at SC.Org! We are exploring how Divine Providence worked in Johnny’s life. Last week, we looked at Johnny Chapman’s birth and early years.

Now, we are going to consider how he encountered Swedenborgianism, and how it impacted his life.

Johnny’s parents were congregational, and he was baptized into that church. His mother died when he was two, when his father was fighting in the Continental army. John and his sister were raised by relatives, until his father returned from the army and re-married. He and his new wife had another ten children. Life was hectic in the house, and John left home at a young age.

By 1790, the year John turned sixteen, he was no longer living with his father and step-mother. It is possible that his father apprenticed him in a skill. Or, he could have been sent back to live with and work for Leominster relatives. Elizabeth, just turning 18, was also not listed with the household that year. A few years later she married a man from Leominster.

It seems that John was living on his own at a young age. He may have felt the need to move west to find better opportunity. Kerrigan says: *By the end of the eighteenth century, the valley offered few opportunities for the eldest son of a poor family. Land was scarce and expensive, and John could not expect to inherit a farm from his landless father.*

When John was 18 [in 1792], he felt a strong yearning to “go west”, and persuaded his half-brother Nathaniel to join him in the adventure. Johnny and his little brother Nathaniel set out in mid to late November. It was risky to leave so close to winter, and perhaps his was waiting for the end of the cider-making season. He used the cider mills to get the apple seeds he carried.

When and how did Johnny encounter the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg?

This is the theory of Howard Means in his book, [Johnny Appleseed: the Man, the Myth, the American Story](#).

Francis Bailey bought [Swedenborg’s] books at public auction and brought them home, where they appear to have been devoured by his adopted daughter Hester (known as Hetty) Barclay. By 1785, Hetty and her father had started a reading circle in their Philadelphia home and print shop at 116 High Street, today’s Market Street. John Young, who also had been present at James Glen’s first talk and was a fellow member of the Bailey household reading circle, was courting Francis Bailey’s other adopted daughter, Maria Barclay, Hetty’s niece perhaps or maybe only her cousin. John and Maria were married in November 1794 at the Old Swedes’ Church in Philadelphia and soon moved west themselves, all the way across the Alleghenies to Greensburg, some thirty miles east of Pittsburgh. As Hetty had done, the Young’s established their own reading circle to discuss and promote Swedenborg’s teachings. And it appears to have been there, in Greensburg, either at John Young’s white wooden house at Second and Main Streets or at his nearby country

cottage, "Skara Glen," that John Chapman first seriously encountered Emanuel Swedenborg, sometime not long after the start of the new century.

Howard Means posits that Chapman was baptized in 1806 when John Hargrove did mass baptisms in Ohio.

It was in 1806 that Chapman finally committed for good to Ohio— the year he was famously sighted drifting down the Ohio River in his makeshift catamaran, bags packed with seed . Something had happened to give his life added direction and purpose. A religious experience— one already felt or powerfully in the making— fits with what is known of the rest of his years.

[Means, Howard (2011-04-12). Johnny Appleseed (Kindle Locations 1515-1523). Simon & Schuster, Inc.. Kindle Edition.]

William Kerrigan has his theories as to how John Chapman came to learn about the Swede who died just two years before he was born. It was probably by picking up tracts that had been distributed by William Schlatter of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia merchant William Schlatter was so enthusiastic about the possibilities of print evangelism that he spent most of his personal fortune on the effort. By 1817, he had distributed over three thousand books and tracts by inserting them gratis into orders of cotton and calico sent to country merchants. [p. 106]

Kerrigan says that Schlatter no doubt included contact information for the Philadelphia New Church in the books and tracts he distributed across the West, and he was the earliest contact between John and the New Church that can be documented. By the spring of 1817, Schlatter had sent some Swedenborgian works directly to John Chapman, but his familiarity with Chapman at that time was still novel. [p. 106]

Soon afterwards, John came in contact with New Church missionaries.

In 1817, in an effort to emulate their more successful rivals the Methodists, the Philadelphia New Church Society sent out two missionaries on a thirty-nine day tour of the South and West during which they baptized thirty-seven converts. The two men apparently encountered John Chapman on this trip and described him as an intelligent and zealous champion of Swedenborgianism. [p. 107]

Whether it was 1806 or 1817 that Johnny encountered Swedenborg, it does seem that he was a devout Swedenborgian by 1817.

The very first General Convention of our denomination was in Philadelphia in 1817. Shortly before this first convention convened, there was a fascinating article in a Swedenborgian newsletter from England:

There is in the western country a very extraordinary missionary of the New Jerusalem. A man has appeared who seems to be almost independent of corporeal wants and sufferings. He goes barefooted, can sleep anywhere, in house or out of house, and live upon the coarsest and most scanty fare. He has actually thawed ice with his bare feet. He procures what books he can of the New Church Swedenborg, travels into the remote settlements, and lends them wherever he



can find readers, and sometimes divides a book into two or three parts for more extensive distribution and usefulness. This man for years past has been in the employment of bringing into cultivation, in numberless places in the wilderness, small patches (two or three acres) of ground, and then sowing apple seeds and rearing nurseries. These become valuable as the settlements approximate, and the profits of the whole are intended for the purpose of enabling him to print all the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and distribute them through the western settlements of the United States."

Kerrigan also says:

By 1820, he had joined forces with Silas Ensign, a former Methodist circuit rider living in Mansfield who had become converted to the doctrines of Swedenborg, and they had formed a small group of Swedenborg enthusiasts. John reached out to his primary contact in Philadelphia William Schlatter, to see if the Philadelphia society could license Ensign as a lay leader. About the same time, Chapman made William Schlatter an unusual offer. The economic situation in the nation had taken a sharp downturn. A postwar boom fueled in large part by the proliferation of paper notes of questionable value turned to a bust when the Bank of the United States began calling in specie payments. In central Ohio, this meant the rapid evaporation of money. Settlers defaulted on land payments and returned to a barter economy to get by. John was not immune to this crisis and found it difficult to find the cash to buy more Swedenborgian books. So he offered Schlatter a land-for-books swap. He would exchange a quarter section of land he had acquired in Wooster County for as many books as the Philadelphia New Church could provide. But Schlatter, who had emerged as the primary financial supporter of the Philadelphia New Church, was in no position to accept the offer.

[Kerrigan, William (2012-10-10). Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard (Kindle Locations 2227-2236). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.]

Kerrigan describes Chapman as an enthusiastic minister of Swedenborg:

Having acquired a few more books from William Schlatter, he soon emerged as central Ohio's most enthusiastic New Church evangelizer. Many family traditions recall John's appearance at the cabin door, asking the residents if they were ready to hear "Good news fresh from heaven!" When he found a receptive audience, he read aloud to the family around the hearth. At other times he left reading materials behind. But as he was able to carry only a small selection with him, he came into the habit of unthreading the bindings of the books, leaving behind just one section with each family, and promising to exchange it for another section upon his return. Some of these may have been bound volumes of tracts, threaded together in such a way to make them easy to divide and share. If he indeed was splitting apart sections of Swedenborg's longer works, such a strategy was unlikely to win many converts, as understanding New Church doctrines was challenging enough when read in the intended order.

What was there about Johnny [Chapman] Appleseed's life that exemplifies Swedenborgian theology? Here are some things to consider:

1. He lived both with his heart and his mind. He learned about his profession and the Van

Mons theory of planting fruit as seed rather than grafting. He learned what kind of soil the trees needed, and he would go back often to check on the growth of his trees. Yet all that he did was focused in his love of people and of the Lord. He felt that he was called to be a preacher and healer; to help God care for people on the plains. He also planted medicinal herbs, and often shared them on his journeys. Swedenborg said that both Love and Wisdom are central to life. They represent spirit-matter; God-humanity; heart-mind. We must bring these “dualisms” into oneness in our lives.

2. He was friend of all. He learned many Indian languages and was held in high regard by many of the tribes. He cared about the concerns of both the Indian tribes and the white settlers, and often intervened in conflict. He never killed – either people or animals. He lived in complete harmony with nature. “In field and meadow and forest, he walked, concerned with the spacious thoughts of God. The singularity of his thinking and his living was inextricably entwined with his religious views”. Swedenborg emphasizes our oneness with all creation; we are part of a web of existence and we contribute to and are nurtured by the whole.

3. His life was focused on “uses”. He lived to be of service to others. Yet, he also attended to his own needs and, as always, that inner leading. He made a living, but money was not his motivation. He would accept cash for his trees – or clothing or food or even nothing at all. He never asked a person to pay a debt, for he reasoned that if God wanted him to have the money, God would move the customer to pay. Besides, the customer knew that he or she owed the money, without being reminded of it. However, he was not poor, and had some assets that he rarely used.??Swedenborg tells us that Love and Wisdom must be expressed by our living a life of useful service to others.

4. He lived by the guidance of his inner calling. Swedenborg tells us that God’s Love is always inflowing to our very being and essence. We can connect with the Divine by looking inward, to find the deep guidance at the depth of our soul. For there we find our deepest love and passion; and it is out of this that we live in oneness with God and the world.

?How can Johnny’s life inspire our lives today?

What better expresses the Divine than a tiny seed so full of its potential to become nurturing, glorious, and useful? Those apple trees and their fruit provide many of us with shade, with food, with spiritual sustenance. This might be a good today to enjoy some apples ... and give a few seeds to your friends to start more apple trees!

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.

Evil & God's Providence

September 15, 2013

READINGS

From the Bible

Joshua 1:1-9: After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

John 9:1-11: As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man." They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Silo'am and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."

Message

Evil & God's Providence

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

The recent events in Syria have led me to ponder the question of human evil and Divine Providence. The use of chemical weapons seems to be nothing short of human evil. It is an act



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

the world community condemns, even if there is debate about how to respond. In thinking about human evil, though, we need to keep in mind one very important point. No matter how awful things look, God presides over human affairs and human events. Jesus tells us:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

Swedenborg adds his voice, to teach us that all the events in the world, and in human behaviour, are under God's care,

. . . every least thing that happens in the world, whether to evil people or to good people, is under divine providence, and particularly that the divine providence is active in the smallest details of our own thoughts and actions and is therefore universal (DP240).

To our finite eyes, it certainly may not look like it sometimes. There's a verse in a Gordon Lightfoot song about the wreck of an iron tanker that sunk in the seventies, killing its whole crew. The line is,

Does any man know
Where the love of God goes
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?
The Searchers all say
She'd have made white fish bay
If she'd put fifty more miles behind her

It is indeed hard to understand why certain events happen in the world, if God is truly watching over us; if every hair on our head is numbered.

We can take two positions when we think about divine providence. The two positions are simply to affirm providence or to deny it. We will find evidence to support either position depending on which position we take. For those who believe in providence, there is plenty of support. And for those who deny providence, support is not lacking. God's providence is part of one's belief system, and like God Himself, cannot be proven to those who refuse to believe. If we remain open to God, we will see countless signs of His power and governance. But if we close our minds to God, we will not see providence anywhere. We will close our mind to any evidence that could present itself. Swedenborg writes,

If we convince ourselves of human prudence to the point of denying divine providence, then when we do happen to see, hear, or read something when we are thinking about it, we do not really notice it. In fact, we cannot, because we are not open to anything from heaven, only to what comes from ourselves (DP 235).

The choice is ours.

When Swedenborg discusses the issue of evil, his perspective is almost exclusively from the person committing the evil—not the victim. So in my discussion, I will first discuss evil as a human choice, then I will make some suggestions about how to react to evil that happens to the victim, or the survivor.

One thing that needs to be said at the outset is that not everything that happens is God's will. God governs everything, certainly. But this doesn't mean that everything that happens is according to His will. He does not will child abuse, or murder, or war, or theft, or any other evil

that humans do. These deeds are permitted by God, but not willed by God. But even the deeds that are permitted, but not willed by God, God still governs. Swedenborg writes,

There are no laws of permission that are simply that, or that they are separate from the laws of divine providence. They are the same thing; so saying that God allows something to happen does not mean that he wants it to happen but that he cannot prevent it because of his goal, which is salvation (DP 234).

As I said above, Swedenborg's discussion of evil is almost exclusively from the point of view of the person committing the evil. God cannot, by divine power, keep evil humans from acting on their evil. He has given every human free will, and God Himself is bound to that law. To take away free will would be to take away our very humanity, and this God will not do. So we cannot be forced to be good by God. We cannot be forced to refrain from evil by God. This is only common sense. And it is to common sense that Swedenborg appeals in discussing this point,

Everyone recognizes that none of us can be compelled to think what we do not want to think or to intend what we do not want to intend. So we cannot be compelled to believe what we do not believe; or to love what we do not love, and certainly not anything that we do not want to love. Our spirit or mind has complete freedom to think, intend, believe, and love (DP 129).

Civil law can restrain behaviour. But no law can change the way a person feels and thinks. And when the law is not around, God cannot restrain an evilly motivated individual from acting on his or her desires.

So how are we to react to evil when it happens to us? There are healthy ways, and there are unhealthy ways. One unhealthy way is to blame the victim. This way of thinking makes the victim somehow responsible for the evil that happened to them. In rape cases, some will suggest that the woman was asking for it, or that she enticed the rapist. This was more the case in the past than it is today, I think. We are now taught everywhere that No means No! Blaming the victim can also occur in abusive relationships. The victim of family abuse can feel that she or he set the abuser off, or somehow caused the abuser to become violent. We hear of alcoholic families in which the alcoholic will blame his or her partner for "driving him or her to drink." Sometimes blaming the victim can become very generalized. I heard some people say about 9/11 that God had removed His protection from the U.S. because of its sins. In more immediate cases, I have heard that evil can happen to an individual or institution because they are harbouring negative energy and they thus attracted the evil. None of these responses to evil are healthy, nor are they accurate. It was with these responses in mind that I chose this morning's reading from the New Testament. In it, Jesus' disciples ask him, "Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:1). Jesus replies that neither he nor his parents caused the blindness. The story then proceeds to talk about Jesus' divine power when he heals the blind man.

Our response to evil is to meet evil with love. Jesus tells us, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-28). This is a hard lesson. We are so often tempted to stew on the evil that someone has done to us. We think about them, we grow in our resentment, and we grow in our hatred for the other person. This does nothing but burn up our own soul. It does nothing but cloud our heart with negativity and hatred. It makes us miserable. I have heard that called giving someone free rent in our heads. We are going to encounter evil. We are going to meet with people who are set against our wellbeing. Their evil is between them and God, and they aren't ours to

govern. If we can't think positive thoughts about those who do evil to us, we can dismiss them from our minds and think about more positive matters.

We also need to be careful about how we view others. We are not in a position to decide whether another person has done actual evil. It could well be that actions we perceive as evil were in reality actions that deflated our self-interest, or that challenged our egos. When we take offence, we need to take a good look at ourselves, and see what part we played in the resentment that could be starting. We also need to separate the person from the action. We may agree that chemical warfare is an evil act. But we cannot make the leap that the person who perpetrated the act is evil spiritually. This may be a very great temptation. But we have not the power to judge. Even that is between the person and God. I think Robert Frost has written a very wise poem on this issue. In it, he writes about one reaction to evil that shows a wonderful composure and equanimity. It may be a hard example to follow, but I think it is a good model for us to strive for—or at least to consider. His poem is called *The Draft Horse*, and I will conclude this talk with it:

With the lantern that wouldn't burn
In too frail a buggy we drove
Behind too heavy a horse
Through a pitch-dark limitless grove.
And a man came out of the trees
And took our horse by the head
And reaching back to his ribs
Deliberately stabbed him dead.
The ponderous beast wend down
With a crack of a broken shaft.
And the night drew through the trees
In one long invidious draft.
The most unquestioning pair
That ever accepted fate
And the least disposed to ascribe
Any more than we had to hate,
We assumed that the man himself
Or someone he had to obey
Wanted us to get down
And walk the rest of the way.

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



Johnny Appleseed Festivals!

September 22, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another. (John 13:34, 35)

From Swedenborg

The goal of creation is a heaven of angels from the human race; so human beings are the goal of creation. All other created things are intermediate goals. Since all of them relate to humanity, they focus on these three aspects: our bodies, our rationality, and our spirituality--which looks toward our union with the Lord.

We cannot be united with the Lord without being spiritual, nor can we be spiritual without being rational, nor can we be rational without being in a state of physical wholeness. It is like a house: our body is like the foundation, our rationality is like the structure of the house built on it, and our spirituality is like the furnishings of the house. Living in the house is being united with the Lord. (Divine Love and Wisdom #330)

Message

JOHNNY APPLESEED FESTIVALS!

Johnny Appleseed and Divine Providence, Part 3

Is there a local Johnny Appleseed festival in your area during the coming week?

This is a popular week for festivals, since Johnny was born on Sept. 26. Here are some of the festivals taking place:

FORT WAYNE

Johnny spent the last years of his life in Ft. Wayne, and the memorial to gravesite is there.

The uniqueness of the Johnny Appleseed Festival still amazes people yet today. It's not often you find a festival with such stringent qualities for its vendors. There is no modern conveniences allowed. Cooking must be done over an open fire, without the use of propane gas. Vendors are required to dress in 1800 period dress, sell products, demonstrate trades, entertain and provide food potentially available within the 1800's. Some food delicacies may look a bit modern, but if you do a bit of research you will find that a similar opportunity was available back then. Many requests to become a vendor or entertain or pass out pamphlets about their group come in through our website everyday, only to be respectfully declined because they did not realize the period style type of festival this is. We have strived to hold ourselves to that standard of maintaining the festival in this fashion and we are praised each and every year for doing so.



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LEOMINSTER

This is the 20th Festival in Leominster, MA – the birthplace of Johnny.

According to organizer Rick Marchand, the number of vendors offering food, cute items for sale, and amusements has increased from 80 to 140 this year. About 90 percent of them, he said, are nonprofit or charitable organizations.

"An amazing amount of money is collected for charities," he said.

In addition, a jump in musical entertainment has warranted a second outdoor stage, and an evening pops show inside City Hall featuring a 40-piece band and a vocalist.

BYRN ATHYN

For the ninth year in a row, Byrn Athyn; this year on Sept. 28th.

Attendees are invited to enjoy locally made goods and crafts, as artists, historians and bakers gather to participate in the fall festival. Craftsmen and women will present demonstrations of spinning wool, pressing apples for cider and making rope in the 18th century style. Additionally, children of all ages can enjoy the tales of Johnny Appleseed, portrayed by annual performer Shawn Rose, as he wanders the festival.

This is the year of “Divine Providence” in General Convention and September is Johnny Appleseed month at SC.org. We are looking this month at how D.P. was present in John Chapman’s life.

Part 1 looked at his early life.

Part 2 looked at how he became Swedenborgian.

Today, Part 3 will look at his later life, and how D.P. was present during those years.

John Chapman died at age 71 in 1845 in Ft. Wayne, IND, where he had spent his later years.

In the fall of 1842, John turned sixty-eight years old, and had been living for a while in Ft. Wayne and surrounding areas. He was still planting and selling apple trees, but had become comfortable with the cash economy that had grown up. He had purchased some nurseries to grow his apple trees. He was making some money, but he continued to live the life of a pauper. As he aged, he did sleep indoors more often and sometimes purchased a meal in a tavern. He continued to give generously to the poor.

That fall, he made one final trip down to Marietta, Ohio, region to visit his half-brothers and sisters. There is a good chance that he walked the entire 285 miles.

There is a charming story about this trip that tells us about Johnny’s views on D.P. towards the end of his life. It is a memoir of a neighbor, W.M. Glines, and shared by Kerrigan ...

According to Glines, Sally's husband John Whitney told the apple tree planter that during a recent storm lightning had struck a massive black oak tree on the far side of his farm, splitting the tree into rail-sized pieces, which Whitney had then sent his sons to collect and make into a much needed rail fence. Chapman was so taken with the story that he demanded to see the place where this had occurred. Glines, Chapman, his brother Nathaniel, and Whitney set off through fields and briars to the location, John peeling off his shoes and going the rest of the way barefoot when they came to a stream.

When they came to the charred remains of the tree, John Chapman launched into "a sermon on the wonderful Providence of God to man," suggesting that God knew the Whitney family was short on labor and desperately needed a rail fence and that the lightning strike was God's doing.

Whitney "hung his head for a moment, and then replied that he always tried to feel thankful to God for his kind care over him and his family, but that he had never heard of His making rails for anybody before." When Chapman insisted that he "must receive all such Providences as special favors from God,"

Whitney deflected and, recalling the story that John had told him probably a dozen times before about getting stuck in a snowstorm in the middle of the woods and having to shelter in a snow bank, asked him why, if God intervened in people's lives in such direct ways, did He not save him from that miserable situation? John responded that he had been "a great fool for putting myself in that situation" and that God in his mercy had "sen[t] snow enough so that I could dig a hole in it and secure myself from freezing."

Kerrigan, William (2012-10-10). Johnny Appleseed and the American Orchard (Kindle Locations 3273-3287). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Kindle Edition.

So, Johnny believed quite literally in a God who intervenes directly in our lives. It is fascinating that this is Johnny's view of Divine Providence, given the Swedenborg has so much to say about "free will" and "forces of nature" being beyond what God will control.

Bruce Henderson, in his Swedenborg Foundation book, *Why Does God Let It Happen?* explains Swedenborg's view this way:

As for natural disasters, God created the "laws of nature." As with the laws of divine providence discussed earlier, he will not interfere with the laws of nature to suit our own idea of what is right. Indeed, the shifting of tectonic plates that results in an earthquake may be just such an example of the laws of nature at work—because God created the world to work that way, he will not change the natural course of events. And even in nature God restores balance and order, as we see most vividly with forest fires.

[HENDERSON, BRUCE (2010-06-01). WHY DOES GOD LET IT HAPPEN? (Kindle Locations 998-1000). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.]

What do you think of Johnny's view of Divine Providence late in his life?

During the coming months, we'll be exploring the questions of how God does or does not intervene in our lives.

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Johnny Appleseed: Myths & Reality

September 29, 2013

**READINGS
From the Bible**

1 Corinthians 13

New International Version (NIV)

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If 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 do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

From Swedenborg

394

There Are Three Universal Categories of Love:
Love for Heaven; Love for the World; and Love for Ourselves

We are starting with these three categories of love because they are universal and fundamental to all types of love and because goodwill has something in common with each of the three.

Love for heaven means love for the Lord and also love for our neighbor. Love for heaven could be called love for usefulness, because both love for the Lord and love for our neighbor have usefulness as their goal.

Love for the world is not only love for wealth and possessions but also love for all the things that the world provides that please our physical senses: beauty pleases our eye, harmony pleases our ear, fragrances please our nose, excellent food pleases our palate, soft touches please our skin. It also includes beautiful clothes, spacious accommodations, and social groups to belong to - all the pleasures that we get from these and many other things.

Love for ourselves is not only a love for respect, glory, fame, and status but also a love for seeking and getting high positions and becoming a leader.

Goodwill has something in common with each of these categories of love, because goodwill is by definition a love for usefulness of all kinds. Goodwill wants to do what is good for our neighbor, and goodness is the same as usefulness.

Message

Johnny Appleseed: Myths and Reality

Soon after Johnny Appleseed's death, stories began circulating of his super-human strengths and abilities. Modern-day researchers have attempted to find the truth within the legends. Here is an exploration of some of the reality behind the myths:

DID JOHNNY LIVE IN ABJECT POVERTY?

Actually, he was a wise business man who owned quite a bit of land. Kerrigan wrote:

Surely his efforts to secure control of hundreds of acres of land before 1819 were inspired by a hope that at some later date he could sell these claims at a handsome profit.

Furthermore, John was in fact peddling a product— the seedling apple tree— to rural customers. He was also in his way “hawking” books, as he traveled from cabin to cabin, seeking to interest families in his Swedenborgian literature.

Johnny owned many of acres of land throughout the Midwest that he used as nurseries for his apple trees, so that he could grow seedling trees to sell to others. However, for people in need, he would give away his trees.

Robert Price says that when Johnny died, he left a considerable estate. He provides a list in the index to his book. However, there were many people who brought claims against the estate, so there nothing left after all the debts were paid.

WHAT WAS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATIVE AMERICANS?

The myth is that he was completely trusted by Native Americans as well as the white settlers. But Kerrigan says:

The reality of John Chapman’s relationship with Native Americans, of course, was more complex. No Native American account of John Chapman has survived. And for every general assertion by a white writer that Indians liked and trusted them, there is a more specific story that suggests this wasn’t always the case. R. I. Curtis recalled John Chapman telling him stories of his “hairbreadth escapes” from Indians seeking to do him harm. W. Glines recounts a story of Indians stealing twenty ponies from Chapman. During the War of 1812, Chapman clearly sided with his white countrymen and on several occasions rushed to warn them of real or imagined Indian threats.

He was a friend to Native Americans in ways that most white people were not, and he had Native American friends. However, in the many hostilities, he tended to work with the white settlers.

DID HE AVOID EVER HURTING AN ANIMAL?

Here is one Johnny Appleseed story from Kerrigan:

...one cold night while sleeping out by a fire, he became distressed when he realized that mosquitoes attracted to the light were flying into the flames. John allegedly put the fire out and slept in the cold rather than contribute to the demise of some of God’s tiniest and peskiest creatures.

Others have said that he never carried a gun and never killed animals for food. But there are stories that contradict this. In one, he hears shots and goes to investigate. When he doesn't return for a long time, his friend almost shoots him for an enemy. He hadn't recognized Johnny

in the shadows because he was laden with deer meat. The shots he heard were a friend shooting a deer. Johnny helped cut and dress the deer for meat, and brought a sizeable portion to share with his friends.

“He never carried a gun, never killed any game,” R. I. Curtis recalled, but as we have seen, some evidence contradicts this. 56 Still, the claims of vegetarianism are frequent enough to merit consideration, and Chapman may have adopted vegetarianism later in life. If he did, he was not inspired to do so by New Church writings but may have been influenced by that rival group of Swedenborgians, the Bible Christians. Metcalfe’s sermon on the abstinence from eating animal flesh was in circulation by 1821. That John, a voracious reader of all things Swedenborgian, may have encountered it and been influenced by it, is a reasonable possibility. 57 Sylvester W. Graham, a Presbyterian minister and America’s most famous vegetarian, began preaching against meat-eating in the 1830s, and Yankee Bronson Alcott, discussed further in

WAS HE VEGETARIAN?

There are many accounts of his eating meat. However, he may have been influenced by vegetarians. Kerrigan writes:

.... the Philadelphia society soon confronted a rival group of Swedenborgians competing for souls in the city. Mancunian William Metcalfe was a follower of one of the original members of the Manchester Swedenborg group, William Cowherd. Inspired by Swedenborg’s description of meat-eating as a dramatic sign of Man’s fall, Cowherd and his followers embraced vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. They split with the Manchester Swedenborgian society over the issue of vegetarianism and formed their own church under the name Bible Christians. When Cowherd died at the relatively young age of fifty, his critics pointed to his death as evidence that vegetarianism was unnatural. Cowherd’s protégé William Metcalfe took up the cause, and convinced forty of his followers to migrate to Philadelphia in 1817, where they established a Bible Christian church in that city.

So, there was a group that split off from the Philadelphia Swedenborgians that was vegetarian. Johnny may have encountered them, and been influenced by them to some extent.

DID HE REALLY GO BAREFOOT?

YES!! However, not exclusively. There are many stories of his wearing cast-off shoes in winter months. In warmer weather, he was almost always barefoot, and his feet became quite hardened against the weather. There is a story of someone giving him a pair of shoes, and of him passing them along to someone more in need.

WAS HE REALLY SWEDENBORGIAN?

Swedenborg was central to Johnny’s views on life. He carried tracts around with him to give to others. He did leave parts of Swedenborgian books at various homes and then pick them up while leaving off other chapters. However many of the books printed in that time were bound in such a way that there were distinct sections that could easily have been separated without tearing the book itself.

The most important reality about Johnny is that he lived love in his life. He had a business in which he earned a modest amount of money. He owned many acres of apple orchards. However, his focus was never on material possessions, but rather being of service to others. He could have had a much more comfortable life, but he chose to live in harsh conditions and share what he had with others.

Johnny's life demonstrates for us a way of "uses" -- a life focused on love for others. Many myths grew up around Johnny Appleseed, but the reality of his life of love is absolute truth.

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

Divine Providence & Mental Illness

October 6, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Encouragement from scripture on mental illness:

"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."
Ecclesiastes 4:12

"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."
Psalm 37: 5-6

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"
Galatians 5:22-23

"Speak up for those that cannot speak for themselves, for the rights for those who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and needy."
Proverbs 31 8-9

"Love your neighbor as yourself"
Matthew 22:39

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve"
Mark 10:45

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."
Galatians 6:2

From Swedenborg

Divine Providence #141 [NCE]

The reason no one is reformed in a state of mental illness is that mental illness deprives us of rationality and therefore of the freedom to act rationally. The mind is sick and not healthy, and while a healthy mind is rational, a sick one is not. The illnesses are things like depression, imagined or illusory guilt, various kinds of hallucinations, mental anguish brought on by misfortunes, and mental anxiety and pain brought on by physical disorders. These are sometimes thought of as temptations, but they are not. Real temptations focus on spiritual issues, and during them the mind is in possession of its skills. The states I am talking about focus on earthly issues, and during them the mind goes mad.

Divine Providence & Mental Illness

This past April, a young man named Matthew Warren committed suicide. His father was Pastor Rick Warren.

You may remember that Rick Warren is the pastor of the evangelical [Saddleback Church](#) and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone; the collapse and revival of American Community* talks about the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, CA. as a new kind of community. It was started by a young Rick Warren, just out of seminary in 1980. He wanted to find a way to help people connect in the world. Now it is one of the largest of the "mega churches" on 74 acres and over 50,000 members.

Rick Warren took a few months off after his son committed suicide. His first sermon back began a series called "How To Get Through What You're Going Through." I wondered how he would discuss the suicide. Would he see it as a lesson from God for lack of faith? I listened to the audio on the Saddleback website.

He gave a personal sermon, sometimes with tears. He said:

"I prayed everyday that God would heal the mental illness of my son; yet that prayer was never answered. It didn't make sense to me. We had good treatment; supportive family. It didn't make sense."

He said he considered giving up on God. Then he thought perhaps it was his fault for a lack of faith in God healing his son. But then he knew that both of those were wrong. He said:

"I'd rather walk with God without questions answered than walk without God with questions answered."

Then he realized an important truth: *God is Mystery*. We don't know or understand how God works in our lives. He only knows that God is always with us. And he doesn't need to have the answers. *When in pain, answers don't matter. I don't need explanations; I need God.*

Warren said that of the 3,000 people there that Sunday, probably 600 had a mental illness. He said that ten years ago, he and his wife felt that God called them to work with people who had HIV/Aids, and help remove the stigma. Now, he says God is calling them to speak for the mentally ill, and work to remove that stigma. He said that when any other organ of the body is broken -- the kidney or liver or heart, we seek treatment. When the brain is broken, we are ashamed to seek treatment.

Rick Warren and his wife Kay were [interviewed by Piers Morgan](#) on CNN on Sept. 17th. Warren said to Piers:



Matthew was not afraid to die. He was afraid of pain. I remember 10 years ago, when he was 17, he came to me sobbing," reveals Warren, offering an absolutely heart-wrenching story about his late son. "He said, 'daddy,' he said, 'it's really clear, I'm not going to get any better. You know, we've gone to the best doctors, the best hospitals, the best treatment therapists. Everything ... prayer, everything you could imagine ... good support.' And he says, 'it's real clear I'm not going to get any better, so why can't I just die.'

Piers asked how he had responded to Matthew, and Warren said:

"I said, 'Matthew, the reason why, is there is a purpose, even in our pain. And I am not willing to just give up and say that the solution isn't there. You might give up, but as your father, as your mother, we're not ever giving up, that we won't find the solution.' I really believe Matthew could have been a great advocate for children in the world. He was an amazingly compassionate kid."

Another minister, Rev. Saburo Masada, has a mentally ill child and wrote on the NAMI FaithNet site:

When our eldest daughter, Charise, became mentally ill in 1975 it was the same kind of blame-game attitude many of our well-meaning friends and others expressed to us. I know they meant well but they were not helpful.

Some said, "Charise is having problems because she is so smart and thinks too much."

- One person said, "But Rev., you're a minister. You shouldn't have problems like that!"
- Some Christians implied, "A real Christian wouldn't get sick like this, and if Charise had real faith, she could avoid or overcome this kind of a problem."
- Others wondered, "Maybe it's God's punishment."
- Some tried to comfort us saying, "Maybe it is God's way of making you grow in your faith."
- One person said, "You should just kick Charise out of the house. That will straighten her out."
- One psychiatrist told us, "Your daughter simply has 'school phobia'. I had that when I was a student but I got over it."
- Some devout Christians advised us, "It's Satan attacking her. We have to cast Satan and his demons out of Charise."

Some of these comments may sound very familiar to you. The assumption was that the question needing an answer was, "Whose fault was it?"--Charise's, her parents', God's, Satan's, or whose?

Like Rick Warren and Saburo Masada both see God's role in mental illness as a mystery. Masada says:

In the midst of Charise's pain and agony, she is a continual inspiration to Marion and me, and to many whose lives are touched by her. It's all by the Grace of God. We don't understand it, but we are witnesses to God's Power working out His Perfect Will in Charise's life and in ours as well.

... The question is not, "Whose fault is it--who's to blame?", but rather, "What does God want me to do in order that His Power and Purpose can be seen working in our lives?" I pray that whenever you have the opportunity, God will help you to become a part of God's Purpose in ministering to the needs of those suffering brain disorders.

Masada and Warren each see themselves as having a calling to change social attitudes about mental illness.

I feel that same calling. I am blessed to have two professions in my life: social worker and minister. I began by wanting to be a minister. But then I got advised that it's really hard to make a living as a minister, and one should have another field. At that point, I was on hold in my ordination process in another denomination, so getting a social work degree seemed like a good idea. Now, in my heart, the two fields become one.

A website that reflects that integration is [NAMI Faith Net](#). The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) [NAMI] was founded in 1979 as a grassroots organization committed to improving the lives of people with mental illness. *NAMI FaithNet is a network of NAMI members and friends dedicated to promoting caring faith communities and promoting the role of faith in recovery for individuals and families affected by mental illness.*

In 1990, the U.S. Congress established the first full week of October as Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) in recognition of NAMI's efforts to raise mental illness awareness. Since then, mental health advocates across the country have joined with others in their communities to sponsor activities, large or small, for public education about mental illness.

MIAW coincides with the National Day of Prayer for Mental Illness Recovery and Understanding (Oct. 8) and [National Depression Screening Day](#) (Oct. 10.)

Another story on NAMI's FaithNet is that of Nancy Lee Head. She was rejected for ordination in her denomination because she had been diagnosed with schizophrenia eighteen years previously. She found other ways to minister, and she wrote on the NAMI site:

Serving dinner to homeless women at Sarah House took on the same, awesome dimension for me that I would imagine serving the Lord's Supper to a congregation would be for an ordained minister. And washing the lice off of Ernestine's back with healing waters, in God's name, reminded me of God's grace just as I would imagine baptizing a child would for an ordained pastor. The gift of faith enabled me to transcend what for me was a major tragedy and to

paint for myself a broader and deeper understanding of the Church and its rituals. The invisible church became more real to me, in many ways, than the visible church, and because of this "faith fact," my life was enriched. God can use our vulnerabilities to bring healing to others with whom we share our faith stories.

Neither Rick Warren nor Saburo Masada blames God for the mental illness of their children. Nancy Lee Head doesn't blame God for her schizophrenia. But they all look to God to sustain them through difficult times. They put it on all of us – all of society – to work to find solutions.

It is US – all of US – in society who together hold the solution. We need to move beyond stereotypes that makes it hard to get treatment, to admit to the problem, and stay in treatment.

The new Health Insurance Marketplace is open for enrollment in every state from now until March 31, 2014. If you are uninsured or underinsured you, you can get quality health coverage with parity mental health benefits (equivalent to medical or surgical) – at little or no cost – and your coverage will begin as early as Jan. 1, 2014. Pre-existing conditions will no longer keep you from being accepted for coverage.

Make sure that you, your family and friends get the coverage you need for treatment for any mental health conditions. Do what you can to encourage people to seek treatment, without stigma, when they need it. Let's all work to create a society that can accept people with mental illness and can respect whatever treatment they need without stigma.

And keep turning to God to sustain you in times of hardship and to guide you in helping others and in changing our social attitudes.

Let us pray.

Prayer for Healing

*God of wholeness, God of healing, Hear our words,
Accept our prayers; Send a special blessing of healing
To (name) son/daughter of (mother's name), among all those of Your
children
who are in need of Your healing blessing.*

—Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, 18th Century Jewish Mystic

Emergence: Autism & Beyond

October 13, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Luke 6

Judging Others

37 "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

39 He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

41 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 42 How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, 360

"To see" signifies to understand because the sight of the eye corresponds to the sight of the mind, which is understanding. The correspondence is from this, that as the understanding sees spiritual things, so the sight of the eye sees natural things.

Message

Emergence: Autism and Beyond

I found a seat in the large lecture hall and looked around. Over in the corner near the front was a tall, grey-haired woman in a black cowboy shirt with a red tie around her neck. I knew at once that that had to be the keynote speaker, Temple Grandin!



I was right! She was introduced as an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University – and perhaps the best-known autistic person in the world! She reviewed her life story for us.

She was born in 1947, and didn't talk until she was three and a half years old. In 1950, she was diagnosed with autism and her parents were encouraged to put her in an institution. Her autobiography, *Emergence: Labeled Autistic*, tells the story of how a little, mute autistic girl grew into a college professor and world renowned lecturer on autism.

She says, "I have read enough to know that there are still many parents, and yes, professionals too, who believe that 'once autistic, always autistic.' This dictum has meant sad and sorry lives for many children diagnosed, as I was in early life, as autistic. To these people, it is incomprehensible that the characteristics of autism can be modified and controlled. However, I feel strongly that I am living proof that they can"

The story of her mother's incredible devotion to her education is told both in the *Emergence*, as well as the HBO movie based on it, "Temple Grandin."

Below is a clip from the movie when she started to speak out about autism. She was a young Ph.D. student attending a conference on autism, and she felt compelled to speak on.



In the talk I heard, Temple referred often to her childhood experiences. She said her parents always pointed out her strengths and helped her develop them. She said that today, many autistic children are pushed to focus on their deficits, and that is true of many people with disabilities – they are encouraged to function like people who are not disabled instead of developing their unique gifts.

Temple discovered that she had a great affinity for understanding animals, and now is a professor of animal science. All through school she saw things differently from others. She encountered many road blocks to following her passions, but she kept pushing ahead to become her own unique person.

She encourages us to look at everyone as a unique person, not as a label. She writes:

Parents come up to me all the time and say things like, “First my kid was diagnosed with high-end autism. Then he was diagnosed with ADHD. Then he was diagnosed with Asperger’s. What is he?” I understand their frustration. They’re at the mercy of a medical system that’s full of label-locked thinkers. But the parents are part of that system too. They’ll ask me, “What’s the single most important thing to do for an autistic kid?” Or “What do I do about a kid who misbehaves?” What does that even mean? I call this kind of thinking label-locked because people get so invested in what the word for the thing is that they no longer see the thing itself.

--Grandin, Temple; Panek, Richard (2013-04-30). *The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum* (Kindle Locations 1386-1396). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition.

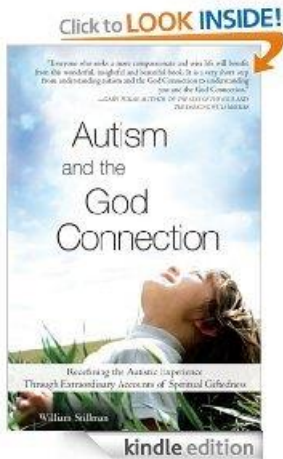
Ms. Grandin focuses on a phrase that is almost a mantra: “different isn’t less.” She writes:



A FEW YEARS AGO Michelle Dawson, an autism researcher at the Rivière-des-Prairies hospital at the University of Montreal, asked herself an important question. Her research on the autistic brain, like the other autism research at the clinic, like autism research everywhere, focused on cognitive impairment— on what was wrong. And she realized that when an autistic person exhibited characteristics that we would call strengths if they belonged to a normal person, we still saw those strengths as merely the fortunate byproducts of bad wiring. But what if they’re not? She asked herself. What if they’re not the byproducts of anything? What if, instead, they’re simply the products of wiring— wiring that’s neither good nor bad?

--Grandin, Temple; Panek, Richard (2013-04-30). *The Autistic Brain: Thinking Across the Spectrum*(Kindle Locations 1593-1598). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Kindle Edition.

At the end of the lecture, we gave Grandin a standing ovation! I left inspired by her wisdom on life.



A book that discusses autism and spirituality is: *Autism and the God Connection: Redefining the Autistic Experience through Extraordinary Accounts of Spiritual Giftedness* by William Stillman. He is a man with Asperger's Syndrome [often seen as a mild form of autism] and he researches spiritual experiences of people with autism. He says in an interview:

This whole "God connection" concept is still very, very new, and, ... persons with developmental disabilities including autism, have historically been marginalized, devalued, degraded, and abused. As a Western culture, we're not "there" yet in terms of our perception that such individuals have value in their "beingness", and may hold intimate insights, wisdom, and giftedness; though Native American culture does subscribe to this concept.

*To me, existing in silence, as a number of autistics do, isn't any different than the person of high religious standing who takes a deliberate vow of silence—why would it be? So there's a double standard in who and what we value: people who meditate, pray, practice yoga want to reach the same spiritual plateau that some autistics attain naturally by living in silence, focusing on a repetitive movement or a perseverative vocalization (a mantra), and perceiving all things seen and unseen. And there is scientific research to support this, as I write in *Autism and the God Connection*.*

Swedenborg was supportive of the wholeness of the human being. Helen Keller had a profound spiritual experience reading Swedenborg: she realized that she had spiritual eyes and ears that were whole – and were more attuned to God than the eyes and ears of most "normal" people. She realized that she was actually not disabled at all.

The only really blind are those who will not see the truth—those who shut their eyes to the spiritual vision. For then alone, darkness is irrevocable. Those who explore the dark with love as a torch and trust as a guide find it good. Blind people who have eyes know that they live in a spiritual world inconceivably more wonderful than the material world that is veiled from them. The landscapes they behold never fade. The flowers they look upon are the immortal flowers which grow in Gods garden. Swedenborg's message is like the rock smitten by Moses, yielding sweet streams of healing water...

She also wrote:

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.

Physicist Stephen Hawking 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.

From a spiritual perspective, "disability" may simply be different abilities. As Temple Grandin says, "different is not less."

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



He Shall Guide His Sheep

October 20, 2013

READINGS

From the Bible

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-27:

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep[a] have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over;[b] I will feed them in justice. . . .

“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will save my flock, they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

“I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

Matthew 25:31-46:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was



thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Message **He Shall Guide His Sheep**

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

Through the image of the lamb, the Bible teaches about God’s love for us and also our response to God’s love. In our reading from Ezekiel, we heard about how God will call everyone to Himself and care for us as a shepherd does his lost sheep. We have the promise that no matter where we stray, or how far we wander from God, God will always be with us, and call us back to Himself. In Ezekiel we read, “I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (34:12). It is God who forms His church from the outpouring of His love and wisdom. But it is up to us to remain open to God’s call and to respond. This is the symbolism of the mountains on which the flocks will feed. Ezekiel says that God’s flock, “shall feed on rich pastures on the mountains of Israel” (34:14). The mountains are high places in our spiritual life. They are those times when we feel particularly close to God. The mountains also symbolize a final state in our regeneration. The mountains are when we are elevated up into heaven and we are acting out of love for God and love for our neighbour. When we are acting from God, we are in a state of rest. When we respond to God’s call, we will rest on His bosom, and find peace. So the prophet tells us, “The mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good pasture land” (34: 14). We can summarize our reading from Ezekiel as being about our relationship to God and God’s relations with us.

Our reading from Matthew is about how we integrate our union with God in our lives. It is about our relations with each other. We are called to show care to each other. Our spiritual relations are not only between God and ourselves. Our spiritual life is also about how we relate to each other. In fact the two—our relations with God, and our relations with each other—these two are intimately related. The one is the measure of the other. When Jesus talks about the separation of the sheep and the goats, the deciding criterion is how we relate to each other. The sheep, who will go to God’s kingdom, are those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, who welcomed the stranger, who clothed the naked, who took care of the sick, and who visited those in prison. Jesus tells these good people, “Just as you did it to one of the least



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of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). This is a clear statement about the relationship between God and our relations with each other. When we do good to each other, we do good to God. And when God is in us, we care for each other.

These two passages are all about the two great laws that Jesus gives us. There are no greater commands than love to God and love to our neighbour. These two commands are actually one. God is in each one of us. What we do to each other we do to the God who is in each of us. We are each created in God’s image and likeness. And as images of God, we are creatures of God. And further, since all the life we have is from God, God is inside each one of us at our deepest and most profound level. God’s Divine Human gives us with our humanity. So our relations with each other is how we relate to the God who is in us. As God’s image and likeness is in us, we are to treat each other as we would Jesus Christ. I do not mean that we would worship each other. What I mean is that we regard each other with the same reverence that we would Jesus. For when we see one another, we are seeing the Divine Human, we are seeing Jesus’ face. “Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

Swedenborg distinguishes between God’s image and God’s likeness in us. God’s image is the truth that we know. But we are not a likeness of God until we act upon this knowledge. God’s likeness is the love that we embody. We can be an image of God without being a likeness if we only know about spirituality. We can elevate our consciousness into the light of heaven and learn deep truths. But knowledge alone is dead without life based upon this knowledge. “Faith without works is dead,” says that apostle James. And our passage from Matthew is clear. We are the sheep that Jesus gives His kingdom to when we treat each other well and with caring. So the image and likeness of God is what we also know as truth and good, or wisdom and love and when we act upon it.

We are formed into God’s image and likeness over time. The first steps of our journey are truth-oriented. We need to learn God’s ways and we need to learn about spiritual life. As we learn about spirituality, we are images of God. But it isn’t until we live according to what we know that we become likenesses of God.

This process is done by God with our cooperation. God calls to us wherever we are in our faith journey. Our reading from Ezekiel is comforting and reassuring. Wherever we are, we can never stray beyond God’s voice. He calls to us wherever we have been “scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (34:12). The darkness that can oppress us in our lives will not have the final say. Wherever we have been scattered by worldliness, self will or other distractions of this world, God will call us into rich pastures and lead us to the mountain top. It is God’s will that everyone, everyone be joined in ecstatic love with Himself. Through our lives, through struggles and setbacks; through uplifting and inspired moments, God is calling, calling, to bring us into His spiritual home, to our spiritual home. As we respond to God’s voice, we are formed into an image of heaven, and our whole personality becomes gentle, meek, and innocent. We truly become the lambs whom Jesus brings into His kingdom. We become the sheep who rest in Israel’s mountains. This innocence and meekness was caught beautifully by the poet William Blake. He was influenced by Swedenborg, and read Swedenborg’s works. I can’t help but think he had some of this process in mind when he wrote his poem THE LAMB:

THE LAMB

Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, & bid thee feed
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb.
He is meek, & he is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

As we respond to God's call, we acquire that tender voice of the lamb. We become meek and mild. And like the Holy One who is called the Lamb of God, we become like Jesus, who is in each of us with His innocence, peace, and loving joy.

Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



Anxiety, God & Swedenborg

October 27, 2013

READINGS **From the Bible**

From the Bible:

Psalm 40

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

*The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.*

*Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.*

*They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.*

From Swedenborg

Angels from the Lord lead and protect us every moment and every moment of every moment.

-Arcana Coelestia 5992

Message

Anxiety, God & Swedenborg

Tamra was 8 years old when she had her first panic attack. She had just arrived at summer camp and was taken to her cabin. Suddenly, she felt as though a bolt of lightning seared through her; leaving her shaking and terrified. She ran wildly out of the cabin, desperately trying to catch her mother before she left. She was relieved to catch her, and begged her take her back home. Angrily her mother agreed, but had to bring Tamra's best friend Suzy along. Everyone was furious at little Tamra. There had been major preparations for this trip, including Suzie's mother sewing identical outfits for the two girls. Usually, Tamra was a people pleaser. But this time she would have chosen death over having to stay in that camp.

Her panic attacks became worse over time. She says:

They became more frequent the older I got and by the time I was twelve I was depressed and did not socialize unless I had to, i.e. go to school, parties, church, etc. I did not know what was going on with me... I didn't have the knowledge, words... No one knew... school friends, teachers...



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She became a people-pleaser who was well-liked by others. She kept her embarrassing secret to herself.

Tamra says:

I was raised Lutheran and my Norwegian grandparents were very strict and pushed the image of God being everywhere just waiting for you to slip up so he could toss you into the fires of hell.

Music, art, nature, Bible stories about Jesus and God's love is what "saved" me from what I now consider religious abuse. I felt the presence of God so intensely at times as a child... and I am so thankful because I didn't have words to describe it then but it was what kept me going. I had this "knowing" that we were all being held in a healing light...

However, by the time she started college, anxiety and depression were her constant states.

My friends and classmates spent a lot of time at wineries for entertainment. That was back in the early seventies when wine tasting in the Napa-Sonoma area was free and not crowded... it was perfect for poor students. I learned a lot about wine, which I appreciated. I also learned that drinking helped my anxiety... at first.

Despite her anxiety and her drinking, she completed college with a B.A. in sociology. Then she signed up for graduate school, and was driving to orientation.

I didn't know what was happening to me. I thought that there was something wrong with my car... like it was leaking gas or fumes of some kind and that that was making me dizzy, and afraid. Over the course of about a month..... Everywhere I went I had panic attacks.. I moved back into my parents' house and soon was completely housebound. I started self-medicating with alcohol.

There is a name for the unspeakable fear that kept Tamra housebound; it is called "agoraphobia." It comes from the Greek work "agora" which means public places. People with this condition are afraid to be in public places

The Mayo clinic says:

Agoraphobia is a type of anxiety disorder in which you avoid situations that you're afraid might cause you to panic. You might avoid being alone, leaving your home or any situation where you could feel trapped, embarrassed or helpless if you do panic.

People with agoraphobia often have a hard time feeling safe in any public place, especially where crowds gather. The fears can be so overwhelming that you may be essentially trapped in your own home.

Agoraphobia treatment can be tough because it usually means confronting your fears. But with medications and psychotherapy, you can escape the trap of agoraphobia and live a more enjoyable life.

Tamra did seek treatment, and she was taught relaxation exercise which helped a bit. Back then, there was no medication in use. Like many others, she turned to alcohol to self-medicate her symptoms. She entered a period that many would call a "dark night of the soul."

At the darkest time while drinking I remember having a vision of my soul... only a weak and tiny light was there and I knew I was dying. I was praying, sobbing and asking for God's help.

During that period, a concept of “co-occurring disorders” was becoming part of social services. It is the combination and interaction of a mental illness with dependence on alcohol/drugs. It often starts when a person with a mental disorder tries to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs.

Many people with anxiety and panic attacks turn to alcohol to calm their nerves. It usually helps – for a while. Over time, alcohol can make panic worse. And ... the person with panic attacks becomes an alcoholic with panic attacks.

Tamra became an alcoholic. She writes of this period in her life:

I called my brother and husband at their work and asked them if they thought I needed to go to a treatment program for drinking... What a question! Anyway they called around... I kept telling them to tell the treatment counselors that I have agoraphobia... I was more afraid of leaving my house than I was to stop drinking.... Well, no, maybe they were both as frightening... but it was super important to me that they knew about this. As it turns out they didn't know much about it.... And back then they didn't want recovering alcoholics to take any medications.

The treatment center said that they wouldn't have room for me for about a week... I told my brother and husband that no way if I didn't go then I probably wouldn't have the nerve to go again.. I went that evening and found out later that the counselors juggled all the beds around and made room for me because they understood the importance of an addict needing to get treatment and willing to get treatment was a very small window of opportunity in a matter of life and death. it's so very important that we have affordable treatment for substance abuse and mental illnesses and when people are ready for help there needs to be a place to get it an affordable place, etc...

Back then, it was difficult to persuade recovering alcoholics to accept medication for mental illness. It was a time when AA sponsors would tell newly sober people that any medication – including anti-depressants – was a break in their sobriety.

Tamra has “co-occurring disorders” The mental illness is panic disorder and agoraphobia. The addiction is alcoholism. Tamra, and others with co-occurring disorders, run the risk of a relapse with alcohol if they DON'T take medication.

For Tamra, the twelve steps of AA helped her to connect with God. However, that didn't stop panic attacks.

Five years after she started her alcoholism treatment, she had her one and only child. Two years later, she took the bold step of standing up in an AA meeting, and she:

...told everyone I was going to start taking anti-depressants. I wanted everyone to know so they didn't think I was secretly taking pills... there was so much negativity back then. I was sober but anxiety was still eating me up... a lot of times I'd only make it to the parking lot of a meeting and couldn't even go inside and a lot of times I couldn't get the courage to even drive to a meeting. I made so much progress after that... medication helped me a lot.



Tamra's courage was part of a change -- when mental health professionals and AA began to understand and honor each other. Therapists increasingly referred people with drug and alcohol problems to 12-step meetings, realizing that they offered a recovery that couldn't happen in the office of a professional. And increasingly, members of AA left issues of medical and mental health treatment to professionals.

For many people, the path of recovery from addiction and/or mental illness is a spiritual one. For Tamra, the twelve steps of AA led her to a deep relationship with God.

I've been studying world religions since college and my spirit was on fire for learning after sobering up, so I sought out classes on every religion I could find. I would "take what I could use and left the rest." But Swedenborg has held my interest for a few decades now... I didn't know any Swedenborgians until I met Rev. Wilma online.... Then I met a then candidate for ordination in the town next to mine. And a few months ago my son discovered a Swedenborg church only ten miles away.... My son has been studying world religions too... he crawled into my library as a baby and now he's 24 yrs. Old. I kept bugging him to read Swedenborg and finally last year he started because his name kept popping up in his other readings.... It's so wonderful to be going to church with him.

Tamra registered with swedenborgiancommunity.org in 2009. On her registration form she wrote:

I'm on disability and have been looking for an online community and to find one that is a Swedenborgian community is a plus... I've been looking for you!

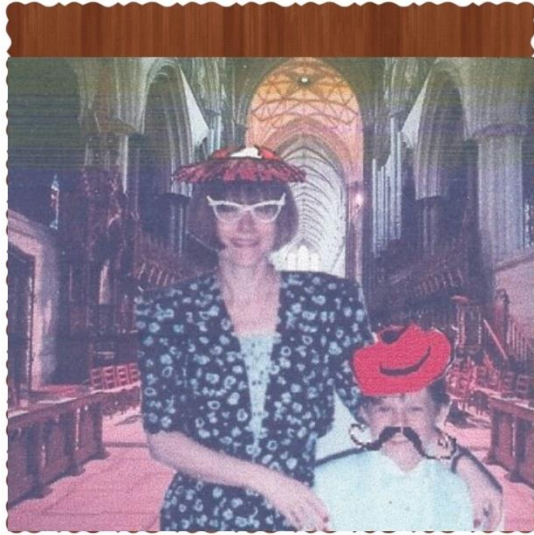
Last month, we got a new registration from her son, Colin. He wrote on his form:

I have recently graduated from San Francisco State University where I earned my BA in Psychology. I now plan to pursue a MA in Counseling, and would like to become a practicing therapist. My other areas of interest are Jungian Psychology and comparative religion. I have recently begun studying Swedenborg and wish to learn more.

For Tamra, her path to healing included both meditation and prayer.

For people who suffer from agoraphobia I hope they will find treatment and keep an open mind about the different therapies available. Almost every agoraphobic I know was afraid to take medication and I have to say that the most relief and progress I've had is from the medication. Also don't ever give up on prayer... God is with us. For friends and family find out everything about this illness and educate others. And pray for the agoraphobic and know that what they are feeling and experiencing is very real... they are not trying to get attention or avoiding responsibilities. They hate having to depend on others and would much rather be independent and busy.....

Motherhood was a blessing for her that opened her heart:



I Thank God many times every day for the gift of being a mother to my son Colin and almost as many times I thank God for giving me a sense of humor..... Humor has helped me all my life. Isn't God great?

I attached a photo of Colin and I Taken many years ago but it still makes me laugh and it captured our hearts full of Joy.

Here is a current photo of Tamra and Colin.



I asked her if art played a role in her healing, and she wrote:

Art.. Of every kind has helped me... Michelangelo..... I was fortunate to go to France and Italy.... the cathedrals and churches had a profound effect on me.... the sacredness of space. Mt. San Michelle and St. Francis first little church near Assisi.....

I was asked to start an art group with a therapy intern and an architect....we've had three meetings.... Art is a huge healer for me.....

She also said:

at a very very important I'm in my life of creativity coach suggested that I draw a circle and start doing art from there.... she told me that making Mandalas could be a very healing experience.



Like so many people, Tamra and Colin have found Swedenborgian concepts with the culture. Tamra first encountered a growth model similar to Swedenborg's when she embraced the 12 steps.



Colin is fascinated with psychologist Carl Jung who was influenced by Swedenborg.

We are fortunate that their spiritual journeys have led them to our on-line community, where they share their love, wisdom, and uses.



Let us pray.

Take a few moments to connect with God in whatever way feels right for you.



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

What Happened to God?

November 3, 2013

Readings

From the Bible

Psalm 54 New International Version (NIV)

Psalm 54[a] For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil[b] of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?"

*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 Arrogant foes are attacking me;
ruthless people are trying to kill me —
people without regard for God.[c]
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, Lord, for it is good.
7 You have delivered me from all my troubles,
and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.*

Footnotes: Psalm 54:1 In Hebrew texts 54:1-7 is numbered 54:3-9. Psalm 54:1 Title: Probably a literary or musical term Psalm 54:3 The Hebrew has Selah (a word of uncertain meaning) here.

From Swedenborg:

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 2535 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).

In John:

When He prayed, saying, Father glorify Thy name, then came there a voice from heaven: I have both glorified, and will glorify again (John 12:27-28);

where it is plain that the Lord's "praying" was speech with the Divine, and revelation at the same time.

Message

Another shooting this week: in LAX airport. So many are asking the question: "Where was God?" It seems as though God has disappeared at a time of need. So just what happened to God?

Understanding Swedenborg's laws of Divine Providence can help us find an answer to that question.

Today, we are re-running a popular message from July 29, 2012, right after the shooting in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado. It introduces us to Swedenborg's five laws of Divine Providence. In the coming months, we will continue to return to these laws as we strive to understand just how God works in our lives and in the world.

After the massacre in Aurora, Colorado, the CNN belief.net posed this question: "*Where was God in Aurora?*" They received more than 10,000 responses! They ranged through many religious traditions, as well as concepts that God doesn't exist.

CNN wrote: "In short, God was in complete control, exercising His will," wrote @PastorRileyF, who leads a church in Bethune, Colorado. That riled Jockey, who tweeted, "If that was God's will, God is definitely not deserving of my worship." @TheTrivia also took issue with the Colorado pastor: "I'm going to respectfully disagree with you Pastor. God gives free will to man, but it wasn't his will that they die."

Here is CNN's summary of the 7 most common answers to the question:

1. There is no God.
2. Don't blame God; blame Satan.
3. Don't blame God; blame us.
4. God was behind the massacre, and it was just.
5. God was present at the massacre but with the victims, not the perpetrator.
6. Which God? *After all, the problem of evil in a world ruled by a sovereign and good God only presents itself if you posit one personal God who is both good and all-powerful.*
7. Who knows? It's a mystery.

To read CNN's complete report on the blog responses, go to [THIS LINK](#).



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Which of these seven positions is closest to the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg? I would say that none of these quite captures the Swedenborgian perspective on free will.

In this book, *Why Does God Let it Happen?* Bruce Henderson gives us an understanding of tragedy and free will from a Swedenborgian perspective.

Here are the five laws of Swedenborg on free will as explained by Henderson:

The first law is that God allows evil to exist for the sake of our freedom. We must be in a state of equilibrium—between good and evil, heaven and hell—to be free to choose the quality of our lives. Without that freedom, we would not feel life to be our own.

The second law is that we must be free to act from our own will, as long as we are making rational choices. Swedenborg says that people cannot be reformed if they are in states of fear, disease, insanity, or ignorance, when they aren't able to make informed, rational decisions. But as long as we are of sound mind and body, we must be free to choose—even if what we choose is not what God would want for us.

The third law is that we should not be compelled to believe in God, in his providence, or in anything, because compulsion takes away freedom. Puppets and robots don't have freedom. Wars have been fought to suppress freedom or to win it, including the freedom to believe as we choose and live accordingly. No one wants to be coerced. God wants for us to make good choices, but he will not—cannot—force us to do so. God's will is that each and every one of us gets to heaven by making good choices, by actually choosing heaven in the way we lead our lives. But he will leave people free to reject him, to embrace evil and to choose hell.

The fourth law is that for us to be truly free, we must be able to see and recognize evil in order to reject it. This is the challenge of freedom. Our culture is a smorgasbord of good and bad choices. We know what it's like to be tempted, but we also know what the healthy choices are. We know what it is to live with the good and bad consequences of choices.

The fifth law is that the operation of divine providence should never be evident to us, but that we should always know that it is working in our lives. Imagine if you could know how God was leading you. You would feel your freedom was threatened and probably would want to rebel, especially if God was trying to lead you out of a destructive habit while you were still enjoying it and not ready to give it up.

[HENDERSON, BRUCE (2010-06-01). WHY DOES GOD LET IT HAPPEN? (Kindle Locations 514-518). Chicago Distribution. Kindle Edition.]

Swedenborg's view of free will is reassuring. God does not want tragedy to take place, but God allows free will for all human beings, and that means that some humans will choose to do evil deeds. God will not interfere with free will.

Where does prayer fit into this? One victim/survivor from Aurora said that he believed he survived because he prayed to God during the massacre. However, one commentator on TV pointed out that some of those who died undoubtedly also prayed. How do we make sense of God's responses -- or lack of responses -- to our prayers?

What does all of this say about God and free will? What happens to God when there is an act of violence? I've started a blog for us -- at the bottom of this page -- to share our ideas with each other.

Let us pray.

Take a few minutes to pray in whatever way is right for you. You might want to sit in silence. Or listen to music. Or take a walk.



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Love, Spirit, Life

God of Sorrow

November 10, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

I Kings 19

From Swedenborg

DP 251

3. People who worship themselves and the world justify their rejection of divine providence as well when they think that wars are permitted, in which so many people are killed and their wealth plundered. It is not because of divine providence that wars happen, because wars are inseparable from murder, plunder, violence, cruelty, and other appalling evils that are diametrically opposed to Christian caring. However, it is absolutely necessary that they be permitted, because since the earliest people, the times meant by Adam and his wife (see §241 above), our life's love has become basically a love of controlling others, ultimately everyone, and of gaining possession of the world's wealth, ultimately all of it. These two loves cannot be kept in chains as long as it is the intent of divine providence that we act freely and rationally, as already explained in §§71–97 [71–99]. There is also the fact that if it were not for this permission, the Lord could not lead us out of our evil, so we could not be reformed and saved. That is, unless evils were allowed to surface, we would not see them and therefore would not admit to them; so we could not be induced to resist them. That is why evils cannot be suppressed by some exercise of divine providence. If they were, they would stay closed in, and like the diseases called cancer and gangrene, would spread and devour everything that is alive and human.



Mighty Force of Mercy

November 17, 2013

**READINGS
From the Bible**

1 Kings 8:31-40

“If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before thine altar in this house, then hear thou in heaven, and act, and judge thy servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct upon his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.

“When thy people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against thee, if they turn again to thee, and acknowledge thy name, and pray and make supplication to thee in this house; then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again to the land which thou gavest to their fathers.

“When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against thee, if they pray toward this place, and acknowledge thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, thy people Israel, when thou dost teach them the good way in which they should walk; and grant rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people as an inheritance.

“If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mildew or locust or caterpillar; if their enemy besieges them in any of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by any man or by all thy people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house; then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and render to each whose heart thou knowest, according to all his ways (for thou, thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men); that they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest to our fathers.

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken



place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Message The Mighty Force of Mercy

by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

We work so hard to achieve what we have in life; and we can, at times, struggle so painfully against some of our defects, that we can be tempted to think we deserve the good things we get. Or, still, we may pride ourselves on the fact that we have attained our achievements by our own hands. There is a common phrase about being a "self-made man." And along these lines we don't want to be beholden to anyone, but stand on our own two feet.

We don't want a hand out. We want to earn our keep. We want no one's pity. But these are all sad myths. And they are the kind of myth that will drag us down into even more misery. In spiritual things, this mindset is dangerous.

The fact is, everything we have is given to us. It is a gift of God, and a gift we haven't earned. The good things we enjoy are given by God out of pure mercy. The illusion is that we are the agents of our own destiny. The illusion is that we are the sources of our happiness. The illusion is that the very life we have is our own. And when we're feeling good, when we're pleased with some kind of spiritual advancement we've made, we may not want to thank God for it. We may want to enjoy ourselves without realizing that God gave us the happiness we have. The God gives us the very life we have.

And that idea—the idea that we do it all ourselves—the idea that we have attained the good things we have by our own hand—that idea will be the very thing that drags us down into more misery. That idea of self needs to be broken. We need to know and acknowledge from the heart that we have no power to lift ourselves out of the mire of selfishness and greed. We have no power to give ourselves the happy things of mutual love. All the things that make us truly happy, all the joys of love, all heavenly happiness that we feel here on earth, are pure, unmerited gifts. And when we don't acknowledge that, we lead ourselves into temptation.

In all temptation there is a state of doubt concerning the presence and mercy of the Lord, and concerning salvation, and such things; for those who are in temptation are in interior anxiety, even to despair; in which they are for the most part kept, to the end that they may be at length confirmed in this, that all things are of the Lord's mercy, that they are saved by Him alone, and that with themselves there is nothing but evil; respecting which they are confirmed through combats in which they overcome (AC 2334).

Now this is a hard teaching to hear. It is hard because no one likes to hear about their own evil. No one likes to hear about our natural tendencies to the lusts of ego and greed. And no one wants to admit that it is God alone who lifts us out of the hell we would make for ourselves without His help.



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But it is through temptations that our ego is deflated. When we find ourselves in a state of misery brought on by our own evil desires—and there is none of us who doesn't have them—we fall to our knees and ask for God's help and mercy. It is not that God wants us to feel misery—that is our own doing. But without God, we would be left with the anxieties of our selfishness and greed and the frustrations we feel when the world doesn't go according to the way we want it.

All right. I've said the bad part. Now comes the good part. There is no sunrise without the darkness of night. The fact is, God is all love, all mercy, and all forgiveness. God wants us to be happy. God wants to give us happiness as a gift. Like all lovers, God wants to give us all He has—and God is infinite love and infinite wisdom and to the extent that we are open, we have no bounds as to the depth of joy we can receive from God.

Jehovah, or the Lord's internal, was the very Celestial of Love, that is, Love itself, to which no other attributes are fitting than those of pure Love, thus of pure Mercy toward the whole human race; which is such that it wishes to save all and make them happy for ever, and to bestow on them all that it has; thus out of pure mercy to draw all who are willing to follow, to heaven, that is, to itself, by the strong force of love (AC 1735).

Let me emphasize those last phrases. God wants to make us all happy for ever; to bestow all that He has on us, and to draw us all into heaven. I really like the last line—by the strong force of love. Swedenborg makes another reference to how powerful God's love is when he says, "From the mercy of the Lord [we are] withheld from evil, and kept in good; and this with a mighty force" (AC 7206).

All we have to do is to let this happen. And in order to let this happen, we need to realize that this is God's mighty force, not our own. And when we are feeling good and happy, we need only give God thanks for it.

Yet when we are most in need of God, we most think we can save ourselves unaided. I once knew a man in Florida. As was common for me, I found myself in a religious conversation in the cigar parlor I used to hang out at. I said that everyone, everywhere, could be saved if they are doing the best they know. That remark really set off this guy. He was drunk, and I try to get away from drunks, especially when religion is brought up. But he demanded over and over, "Why do I need to be saved?" This man was very successful and rich, and was driven around in a limousine because his driving privileges were revoked. I got to know him in a little while. One night, when I was riding around in his limo, he was in a fit of desperation, "I'm done. If you can't tell me why, I won't be alive tomorrow." Then he recanted. He said, "No, that's not fair to you." This is the man who asked me why he needed to be saved. I'm happy to say that he later joined AA, and even accepted the spirituality of the program.

But it takes such states of grief and despair to break that illusion that we do it all ourselves. And the real kicker here, is that we do indeed have a responsibility in this process. God gives us heavenly joy out of pure love and mercy, but we have to respond to God's call and live a Godly life.

Divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race to save it, and it is likewise with every person, and never recedes from any one; so that whoever can be saved, is saved. And yet no

one can be saved but by Divine means, which are revealed by the Lord in the Word. Divine means are what are called Divine truths; these teach in what manner man is to live in order that he may be saved; . . . So far therefore as a person abstains from evil, so far the Lord out of pure mercy leads him by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world, and afterward to eternity (HH 522).

Our part is to clean the inside of the cup, as Jesus tells us in Matthew 23:25-26, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”

This process is called reformation in Swedenborg and as we heard just above, it begins in infancy and proceeds to the end of our life in this world, and then, he goes on to say, afterward to eternity. Not only does this reformation process go on into eternity, it can happen in the next life if it hasn't happened here. I found a really interesting quote in Swedenborg as I was preparing for this talk. It is in a passage about the despair a person goes through in temptation. It goes as follows:

That they who are being reformed are reduced into ignorance of truth or into desolation, even to grief and despair, and that they then first have comfort . . . They who are such that they can be reformed, if not in the life of the body, yet in the other life are led into this state of reformation . . . and are at length taken away into heaven, where they are instructed among angels as it were anew in the goods and truths of faith (AC 2694).

So reformation can happen in the next life even if it hasn't happened here. This makes me think of those unfortunates I see who it looks like they haven't gotten a fair break. They come from abusive parents, or drug abusers, and they follow the circle of dysfunction in their own life. They don't seem to have been given a fair start in life, and seem to have no one to fall back on. I think of these cases in relation to this passage from Swedenborg. Perhaps these are the ones who are reformed in the next life, taken up into heaven, and instructed anew by angels.

How much misery and grief we go through ultimately depends on how tough a case we are. How much is it going to take to break that ego that tells us we made ourself in our own image? What is it going to take to realize that every good thing we have is a gift, from a God who loves us immeasurably? How much will it take us to be genuinely thankful at heart, and humble. I think the blues musician Roy Buchanan has some fitting words to conclude this talk,

Thank you God, saw your sun rise today
Bless you God, got to see my little children play
It may not be the right way to pray
But I want to thank you anyway
Thank you God

Thankful God

November 24, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Psalm 100 (KJV)

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

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.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

From Swedenborg

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 522, Verse 17

Saying, We give Thee thanks O Lord God Almighty, who is, and who was, and who is to come, signifies the confession and glorification by the angels of heaven, that the Lord is He who is, who lives, and has power from Himself, and who rules all things, because He alone is eternal and infinite. By "giving thanks" is signified the acknowledgment and glorification of the Lord; that the Son of man, who is the Lord as to the Divine Human, is the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, also who is, and who was, and who is to come, may be seen above in Revelation (chap. 1:8, 11, 17; 2:8; 4:8); and that thereby is signified that it is He who is, lives, and has power from Himself, who rules all things, and is alone eternal and infinite, and God, may be seen above (n. 13, 29-31, 38, 57, 92).

Message

The Thankful God

This year, we are exploring aspects of Divine Providence. This week, as the U.S. prepares for Thanksgiving, many of us are giving thanks for the many blessings in our lives. It's a good time for us to remember that Divine Providence is grateful for each one of us.

Do you sometimes see God as harsh and demanding? Do you ever think that God is disappointed in you? Have you ever worried that after death God will judge you as unworthy of heaven and send you to hell?

Many of us were raised with this concept of a judgmental and demanding God. One thing we can be grateful for is Swedenborg's writings that teach us that Divine Providence is pure Love and Wisdom. God intends heaven for all of us, and it is only through our own choice that we do not enter there.

God is thankful for so many blessings.

God is thankful that you were created and that you exist and that you are you!
I think that God is thankful when we feel gratitude. Swedenborg wrote:

By "giving thanks" is signified the acknowledgment and glorification of the Lord;

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. Swedenborg said:
'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving' signifies the Lord's spiritual Divine things.

I think that Divine Providence is most pleased when we give thanks for the blessings that we can share with others. Sometimes, we give thanks for blessings that are good for us or our family, but come at the expense of harming others. The true history of Thanksgiving suggests that this holiday may have begun from such mixed motives.

A 2010 [Thanksgiving article](#) in the *Huffington Post* says:

The first Thanksgiving Day did occur in the year 1637, but it was nothing like our Thanksgiving today. On that day the Massachusetts Colony Governor, John Winthrop, proclaimed such a "Thanksgiving" to celebrate the safe return of a band of heavily armed hunters, all colonial volunteers. They had just returned from their journey to what is now Mystic, Connecticut, where they massacred 700 Pequot Indians. Seven hundred Indians - men, women and children - all murdered.

A Thanksgiving sermon was given in Plymouth in 1623 by Rev. Mather the Elder. He

... gave special thanks to God for the devastating plague of smallpox which wiped out the majority of the Wampanoa Indians who had been their benefactors. He praised God for destroying "chiefly young men and children, the very seeds of increase, thus clearing the forests to make way for a better growth", i.e., the Pilgrims.

In 1970, Frank B. [Wamsutta,] an Aquinnah Wampanoag elder and activist, was asked to speak at a Massachusetts banquet celebrating the 350th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims. He was asked to submit an advanced copy of the speech. When the banquet planners saw the speech, they refused to let him deliver it, and they wrote one for him. He refused to give their speech. Instead he went to Plymouth Rock on Cole's Hill at the feet of the statue of Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoag. He was joined by many others, who now gather there each Thanksgiving for a National Day of Mourning.

Wamsutta died at the age of 77 in 2001. The National Day of Mourning protest in Plymouth continues yearly, and is now led by his son.

This, in part, is what Wamsutta wanted to say at the banquet in 1970:

It is with mixed emotion that I stand here to share my thoughts. This is a time of celebration for you—celebrating an anniversary of a beginning for the white man in America. A time of looking back, of reflection. It is with a heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my People.

...

You the white man are celebrating an anniversary. We the Wampanoags will help you celebrate in the concept of a beginning. It was the beginning of a new life for the Pilgrims. Now, 350 years later it is a beginning of a new determination for the original American: the American Indian.

As we gather around Thanksgiving tables this week, let's remember our many blessings. Let's remember that God gives thanks for the life of each and every one of us. And God gives thanks for the ways we can all improve the lives of others. Let's join God in being grateful for those blessings that we can share with all the peoples of the earth.

Take a moment to pray, and give thanks for the many ways your life is improving the lives of others around you.



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The God of Hope

December 1, 2013

READINGS
FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 24:36-44

36“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 42Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

FROM SWEDENBORG

The need to preserve our ability to act in freedom and to act rationally is also the reason we are not granted foreknowledge of events. That is, it is common knowledge that if we love something, we want it to happen and we use our reason to move in that direction. Further, whenever we are considering something rationally, it is from a love of having it become a reality by means of our thought. So if we knew the result or the outcome because of some divine prediction, our reason would yield, and our love would yield along with it. Love and reason together find closure in results, and a new love takes over from there.

The very delight of our reason is to see a result that comes from love by thought, not as it happens but beforehand, or not in the present but in the future. This is what gives us what we call hope, waxing and waning in our rationality as we see or await a result. This delight finds its fulfillment in the outcome, but then both it and thought about it are cancelled.

[2] The same thing would happen if an outcome were foreknown. Divine Providence 178 NCE

The God of Hope



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 liturgical year. It is the season of waiting for the birth of Jesus – or as Swedenborg would emphasize – the coming of light into a dark world.

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.

Hanukkah is about an amazing story of hope. The Jews had to defend their Temple from the Greeks and finally won the battle. 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! The song, "Light One Candle" commemorates that occasion.

This year, Hanukkah began on the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving. The overlap of these two holidays last happened in 1888 and won't happen again – according to some sources -- for about 78,000 years!



For Swedenborg, Advent had a lot to do with light. Swedenborg points out that "Advent" is a morning of the Lord.

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.

[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." AC 2405

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.

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.

All of this helps us to understand an important aspect of Divine Providence: Hope.

When we look at all that is happening in the world today, it is easy to feel despair. Gun violence is rapidly increasing in the U.S. There are wars and threats of war around the world. Children die of hunger and lack of medical care around the world, as well as in our great nation.

For Swedenborg, "light" and "hope" are closely intertwined. When evil become overwhelming in the world, the Lord was born to bring us new light.

We are each one of us, another light in the world, and bringing hope to darkness. There is hope in the light is inside of you, and in all of the people around you. There is no darkness so deep, that the light of Divine Providence cannot bring hope!



Nelson Mandela: Blessed Peacemaker

December 8, 2013

READINGS
From the Bible

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

The Beatitudes

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

Luke 1

Good News Translation

The Birth of Jesus Is Announced

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her,

"Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"

Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?"

The angel answered,

"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God. Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. For there is nothing that God cannot do."

From Swedenborg

The State of Peace in Heaven

Anyone who has not experienced heaven's peace cannot know what the peace is that angels enjoy. As long as we are in our bodies, we cannot accept heaven's peace, so we cannot perceive it, our perception being on the natural level. In order to perceive it, we need to be the kind of person who as to thought can be raised and taken out of the body and brought into the spirit so as to be with angels. Since I have perceived heaven's peace in this way, I can describe it, but not in words as it really is, because human words are not adequate. Using words, I can only describe what it is like compared to that peace of mind that people have who are content in God.

Message

Blessed Are The Peacemakers: Nelson Mandela

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

One of God's most devoted children and peacemakers has entered into the heavenly life.

Nelson Mandela died this week. If we want to understand Swedenborg's concept of "peace", then we could have no better example than Mandela's life. This is an ideal to Sunday to discuss "peace." This is the second Sunday in Advent, a time when many Christian traditions focus on "peace."

Swedenborg tells us where peace comes from:

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



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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]

The Lord's Divine peace was within Mandela, but it was a long road for him to peace – and to freedom.

He was born July 18, 1918, in a small village in South Africa and he was named Rolihlahla Mandela. His first name is sometimes translated as "troublemaker." He was given the name "Nelson" when he was older and studying in a Methodist school, where the children were given a Christian name.

Nelson's father died when Nelson was nine, and he was sent to live with a prominent family that enabled him to receive a good education. He learned about the history of Africa, and the oppression that came from the British domination. He attended a college that was Africa's "Harvard," but soon he became involved in civil disobedience trying to obtain better conditions for the students. He was expelled. His adopted father was furious. He selected a wife for Nelson, and demanded he return to college. Mandela ran off to Johannesburg, where he got his bachelor's degree by correspondence. He began to study law.

Soon he became actively involved in the anti-apartheid movement. He joined the African National Congress in 1942. He worked to make the ANC a real grassroots movement, inspired by the peasants of the land. Mandela became a leader of the movement, and for twenty years led non-violent protest against apartheid.

By 1961 he came to believe that some violence was needed to secure freedom for Black people and he became involved in guerilla warfare. He was arrested and tried – and sentenced to life in prison. He was greatly relieved: he had expected to be put to death.

He spent the next 27 years in prison; with particularly brutal conditions in the early years.

I have been reading his autobiography; *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. It is an amazing and fascinating book. Not being able to read all of it before writing this message, I focused on his years in prison, to understand how he survived. It was an incredible story.

Most of those years were on Robben Island, a desolate location with an inhumane prison. I had imagined those years as being times where he was voiceless and in despair. I was very wrong! Every day he found ways to further his goals: connecting with and standing up for the rights of the other prisoners – esp. the political ones, supporting the ANC efforts on the outside, and continuing to grow as a human being.

He wrote:

Prison and the authorities conspire to rob each man of his dignity. In and of itself, that assured that I would survive, for any man or institution that tries to rob me of my dignity will lose because

I will not part with it at any price or under any pressure. I never seriously considered the possibility that I would not emerge from prison one day. I never thought that a life sentence truly meant life and that I would die behind bars. Perhaps I was denying this prospect because it was too unpleasant to contemplate. But I always knew that someday I would once again feel the grass under my feet and walk in the sunshine as a free man. I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lay defeat and death.

[Mandela, Nelson (2008-03-11). Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Kindle Locations 6531-6538). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.]

He also said:

"I realized that they could take everything from me except my mind and my heart. They could not take those things. Those things I still had control over. And I decided not to give them away."

He finished his law degree while in prison, and helped many prisoners appeal their cases. He helped make education available to all of the prisoners.

He was finally released. He writes of that day:

But as I got closer to the car that would take me away, I realized that when I went through that gate, if I still hated them, they would still have me. I wanted to be free. And so I let it go."

[Mandela, Nelson (2008-03-11). Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela (Kindle Locations 49-56). Little, Brown and Company. Kindle Edition.]

He has also said: *"To make peace with an enemy one must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes one's partner."*

He lived that philosophy. In 1993, he and President de Klerk won the Nobel peace prize for their work at ending apartheid. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa, and Mandela became the first Black president of the country. The same year he published his autobiography, much of which had been written in prison.

How does his life help us understand Swedenborg's perspective on peace?

Mandela demonstrates a concept of peace that comes from within – from one's relationship with the Divine. He shows an understanding of "peace" that includes everyone; recognizing that all of humanity is truly one – and no one is inferior to another.

Mandela's long walk to freedom was a walk with Divine Providence. Mandela understood that the very essence of peace was that the Divine is in each of us; that Divine Providence IS peace.

May you find peace this week in your heart, and experience it each day.

God of Joy

December 15, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, 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. Keep 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.

I 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. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I 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

I 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:4-13

From Swedenborg

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 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



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Message The Joyful God



Recently, CNN had a special program called “To Heaven and Back.” It featured several people who had had “near death” experiences. One of those guests was Dr. Mary Neal. She had a terrifying accident while kayaking. She almost died, but her experience was one of pure joy in heaven.

This is the third Sunday of Advent, when we light the candle of “joy.”

Mary Neal has quite a story of “joy.” Most of this information is from her book, *To Heaven and Back; a Doctor’s Account of her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again. A true story.*

She begins her book with this quote:

“The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.” —Helen Keller

Mary Neal grew up in Michigan, and attended the University of Kentucky and UCLA. She received advanced training in orthopedic spinal surgery. While in training, she met Bill, her future husband. They married and set up practice in orthopedic surgery. They had children, and were living an idyllic life.

She and her husband took a trip to South America, where Mary took a kayak trip with friends. Her kayak capsized and she was caught under a waterfall. She was technically dead for half an hour, before she was revived for a long recovery journey. Mary revealed that during that half an hour, she went to heaven and back; returning reluctantly only because she was told that she had to. She writes:

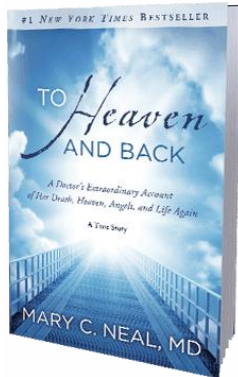
Many have described my accident as terrible and tragic. I describe it as one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

When she first realized that she was pinned under the waterfall, she didn’t panic, but did use tools she knew from her considerable experience. However, they did not work this time.

She writes:

I thought about my family and desperately tried to raise my head out of the water in search of air. I quickly realized that I was not in control of my future. God had saved me more than once in the past so I, once again, reached toward God and asked for His divine intervention. I did not demand rescue. I knew that He loved me and had a plan for me. I asked only that His will be done. At the very moment I turned to Him, I was overcome with an absolute feeling of calm, peace, and of the very physical sensation of being held in someone's arms while being stroked and comforted. Neal MD., Mary C. (2012-05-23).

[To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story (p. 57). The Doubleday Religious Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.]



She felt loving arms around her, and was certain that it was Jesus holding and comforting her. Jesus took her through a life review. However, it wasn't based on the events themselves, but rather the ripple effect that each event had on others.

When I no longer felt myself trying to breathe, I assumed that I would die. My thoughts returned to my husband and children and as I pondered what would become of them without my presence as a wife and mother, I was deeply and profoundly reassured that they would be okay; even if I died.

Meanwhile, her friends were trying desperately to save her. They despaired of reaching her capsized boat to pull her to safety, when rocks suddenly appeared – just where they needed to take a stop to reach Mary. Later, they called it a miracle.

They pulled her out of the water and started CPR. In the meantime, Mary was being greeted by 15-20 glorious beings, sent by God. She writes that she felt: *the most overwhelming joy I have ever experienced and could ever imagine. It was joy at an unadulterated core level.*

She couldn't specifically name any of the beings, but she was certain that she knew them. They were celebrating her arrival and her making it across the "finish line."

She says: *My arrival was joyously celebrated and a feeling of absolute love was palpable as these spiritual beings and I hugged, danced, and greeted each other.*

They all felt great excitement about "returning home" as they walked along a path.

She glanced back at her body; now like an old, comfortable friend.

Her friends were desperately trying to revive her. They begged her to take a breath. She didn't want her friends to be sad, so she asked her new companions to wait a bit while she returned to her body to take a breath.

Then, she again left her body to return to the heavenly beings. She found that they were walking towards an incredible light from a shimmering building. She felt great desire to reach that building, and knew that it was a central stopping point for all souls after death of the body.

There was only one obstacle to her entering that building: her friend on earth kept begging her to breathe. Then her new companions suddenly became very sad, and told her that it was not yet her time to enter that building.

She protested loudly that she did not want to return; she wanted to stay in this heavenly place. However, the beings were insistent that she had more work to do on the earth. Reluctantly, she laid down in her body and began to breathe again.

She returned to her earthly life with renewed passion and commitment. She says on her [website](#):

I wrote it [her book] because more than anything I want people to know that God's unconditional love for each of us is intense, complete, and is reflected in all of Heaven. Before we return to Heaven, our real home, we have an incredible opportunity on Earth to face challenges that will help us learn, grow and to become more Christ-like in the fruits of our spirit. Our time is so short that we need to be about God's business every day.

She explains in her book how she has changed:

Is God present in our world today? Do miracles still occur? Are there really angels all around us? Does God keep His promises? Is there sufficient reason to live by faith? I believe the answer to each one of these questions is a definitive "yes" and I believe that you will come to this same conclusion as you read about the miracles I have seen and experienced.

Mary went through some hard times after the experience as she integrated its meaning into her life. Now, she lives with a sense of peace she had never known before. Joy is now a part of ever-day life for her. She has a renewed purpose as she travels, speaks, and writes of her time in heaven.

This is the kind of story that can fill us with Christmas joy. It is a reassuring story, as it gives us a glimpse of what awaits us all in the next life. It reminds us that "joy" is our natural state.

It is not much different from what Swedenborg tells us about heaven.

It is important for us to be reminded that heaven is real – and heaven is here and now. Angels are real – and we can be angels to each other.

In what ways can you find joy of the season – and of eternal life – this week?

Let us pray: Find a quiet spot where you can sit and find your inner joy.

God Is The Light

December 22, 2013

Message

God Is The Light

Luke 2

The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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.

Swedenborg

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. AC 3900:9

How is the Lord being born in you this Christmas? What parts of yourself have been hidden that God wants you to bring to the light? How does God want you to see the light in your life?

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 4594

This is Bethlehem. That this signifies in place thereof the resurrection of a new spiritual of the celestial...

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. ...

[from J. F. Potts, The Swedenborg Concordance. A Complete Work of Reference to the *Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (Swedenborg Society 1888)]

A true story of a Christmas angel:



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Glennyce Eckersley is a woman in England who started writing down the many stories people told her about angels in their lives. Then she put the stories in categories, and added some Swedenborgian theology about angels. Her book, *An Angel at my Shoulder*, became quite popular in the British Isles and then on the Continent. Then even more people told her their angel stories, and she wrote more books. Below is a summary of her story, The Christmas Angel. Read the complete story here:

<http://www.creationsmagazine.com/articles/C123/Eckersley.html>

It was Dec. 23, 2002. Steve got an emergency call that a boiler had stopped working. This was the work Steve did for a living, and he went over to look at the situation. He realized sadly that the boiler would not work until he obtained a very special circuit board that had to be ordered in advance. It would take several weeks, and this family would have no heat or hot water during Christmas. He put his hand on the boiler and asked angels to please help the family. Nothing happened. He went out to his van to finish up before giving these people the bad news. As he opened the van door, a circuit board fell into his hands! He was startled, as he didn't carry these board in his van – and this was special one that had to be ordered; in no way did he have one in his van!

So he repaired the boiler, never telling the family about the miracle. Sometime later, he met with Glennyce Eckersley at a health center to tell her the story for her book. Just as he was telling her that the family never knew about the miracle, he looked up and saw the woman in the story walk past the window! He invited her in, and she heard about her Christmas miracle!

Let us Pray:

Thank you, Lord, for the hope, peace, joy, and love that You bring into our hearts at Christmas. Help us to be open to Your Light, and to let Your Light shine to all around us.

Christmas Eve, 2013

December 24, 2013

READING from the BIBLE

Luke 2:1-2

2In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

READING from Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 286

a. In the highest sense, peace means the Lord, because he is the source of peace; and in the inner sense it means heaven, because people there are in a state of peace: 3780, 4681. Peace in the heavens is the divine nature profoundly touching everything good and true there with a blessedness that is beyond our comprehension: 92, 3780, 5662, 8455, 8665.

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

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

Christmas Eve

by Rev. Wilma



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It was Christmas Eve of 1914. It was the first Christmas of the World War I. One soldier in the trenches that night wrote about what happened:

It was a beautiful moonlit night, frost on the ground, white almost everywhere; and about 7 or 8 in the evening there was a lot of commotion in the German trenches and there were these lights -I don't know what they were. And then they sang "Silent Night" - "Stille Nacht." I shall never forget it, it was one of the highlights of my life. I thought, what a beautiful tune.

Another soldier wrote about what happened next:

Then suddenly lights began to appear along the German parapet, which were evidently make-shift Christmas trees, adorned with lighted candles, which burnt steadily in the still, frosty air! ... First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up "O Come, All Ye Faithful" the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words Adeste Fideles. And I thought, well, this is really a most extraordinary thing - two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.

A German soldier wrote:

I shouted to our enemies that we didn't wish to shoot and that we make a Christmas truce. I said I would come from my side and we could speak with each other. First there was silence, then I shouted once more, invited them, and the British shouted "No shooting!" Then a man came out of the trenches and I on my side did the same and so we came together and we shook hands - a bit cautiously!

Another soldier wrote:

We shook hands, wished each other a Merry Xmas, and were soon conversing as if we had known each other for years. We were in front of their wire entanglements and surrounded by Germans - Fritz and I in the center talking, and Fritz occasionally translating to his friends what I was saying. We stood inside the circle like street corner orators. ... What a sight - little groups of Germans and British extending almost the length of our front! Out of the darkness we could hear laughter and see lighted matches, a German lighting a Scotchman's cigarette and vice versa, exchanging cigarettes and souvenirs.

Christmas Eve is a time for miracles!

Swedenborg talks about God as the like the sun; with its rays shining down on every one and every thing. He talks of God as "inflow" of light and love into each one of us every moment of every day.

How can you open your heart more fully to accept this light tonight? What is God birthing in your heart tonight, that will shine forth within your life?

Johnny Appleseed & Divine Providence, Pt. 1

December 25, 2013

READING

John 1:1-18

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reading from Swedenborg:

287 Because these are the origins of peace, the Lord is called the Prince of Peace and says that peace comes from him and that peace is in him. So too angels are called angels of peace and heaven the dwelling place of peace, as in the following passages:

A child is born to us, a son is given to us, on whose shoulder the government [shall rest], and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace; of the increase of government and peace there shall be no end. (Isaiah 9:5–6 [6–7])

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27) I have told you these things so that you might have peace in me. (John 16:33)

May Jehovah lift his face to you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:26) The angels of peace weep bitterly, the highways are ruined. (Isaiah 33:7–8) The work of justice will be peace, and my people will live in a dwelling place of peace. (Isaiah 32:17–18) [2]

We may also gather that "peace" in the Word means divine and heavenly peace from other passages where it is mentioned, as for example in Isaiah 52:7; 54:10; 59:8; Jeremiah 16:5; 25:37; 29:11; Haggai 2:9; Zechariah 8:12; Psalms 37:37; and elsewhere. Because peace means the Lord and heaven and also heavenly joy and the delight of good, greetings in ancient times were—and consequently still are—

"Peace be with you."

Heaven and Hell

Christmas Morning

The Bells on Christmas Day

For Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the famous poet who lived from 1807 to 1882, Christmas had become a season of grief. He never got over the tragic death of his wife Fanny in July of 1861. It was a terrible accident, on a lovely day. She was cutting locks of her daughter's hair and wanted to preserve them in an envelope. She melted sealing wax with a candle, and a breeze came through the window, causing her dress to catch



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fire. She ran to the next room, to her husband, who threw his arms around her to try and extinguish the flames. He himself was badly burned, and she died the next day. He was already deeply-saddened by the Civil War that had begun just a few months before her death.

The first Christmas after Fanny's death, Longfellow wrote, "How inexpressibly sad are all holidays." A year after the incident he wrote, "I can make no record of these days. Better leave them wrapped in silence. Perhaps someday God will give me peace." In the Christmas of 1862 he wrote, "A merry Christmas' say the children, but that is no more for me."

Just before Christmas 1863, Longfellow heard that his oldest son Charles, a lieutenant in the Union army, had been severely wounded with a bullet that had almost paralyzed him. The Christmas of 1863 was silent in his journal .

But then, on December 25, 1864, he heard the bells and felt hope again stirring in his heart. Perhaps he was encouraged by the re-election of Lincoln, and saw hope for the end of the war.

On that Christmas morn, he was able to write: "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, nor doth he sleep! The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail, with peace on earth, good-will to men!'" Again, hope had defeated despair.



I felt a kinship with Longfellow and his family while I attended seminary at the Episcopal Divinity School, just down the street from Longfellow's home in Cambridge. I passed by it often, and wondered what their life had been like there. Now I know that it was filled with deep tragedy; but, still he was able to hear the hope of the bells on Christmas Day, and write one of our most beloved Christmas carols.

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom

Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Till ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,
'For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.'

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.'



Beginning Anew

December 29, 2013

READINGS From the Bible

Genesis 1 (New International Version)

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

From Swedenborg

"The beginning" includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation. ...

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ...

Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE

Message BEGINNING ANEW

This week we will celebrate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. It's a time when we often think about getting a fresh start in our lives; beginning anew. New Year's can be the moment we have been awaiting for a new burst of freedom; like for the blackbird in our opening song.

To Swedenborg, new beginnings were part of the process of spiritual growth, which he called "regeneration."

He saw the days of creation as telling this story of spiritual growth.

The first day of creation was when God created light, and separated it from darkness.

Swedenborg says that there are deeper, spiritual truths in the Bible than are expressed in the story itself. The early verses of Genesis are about opening our inner, spiritual eyes to God's light.

That first day is described this way in *Heavenly Secrets*:

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted... Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ... Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE

The new "Reader's Guide" to *Heavenly Secrets* notes that the stage just prior to rebirth [of void and empty earth] can be one of devastation; a stage called "the dark night of soul" by St. John of the Cross, and others in Christian mystical history. [Footnote #34 on page 601.]

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. [S.H. #18]

We often think of the end of a year as a chance to let go of old parts of our selves; and the New Year as a chance to claim new ones. Often, we make resolutions for the New Year to change our behaviors in some way: to lose weight, to exercise more, eat better, budget money, etc. It is a hard way to start a new year, and most of us forget about the resolutions within a few weeks.

For Swedenborg, the way to begin a spiritual journey is not so much about what we do, but who we are.

In his commentary on Gen 1:3 [*and God said let there be light*], he wrote:

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent. [SH, 20]

If you focus just on external matters – of the earth and of the ego – then what you consider “good” is only a selfish idea based on your own need. *We need to know, too, that the Lord is Goodness itself, or life, and truth itself, or the light, and consequently that nothing good or true exists that does not come from him.*

We start the journey by letting in the light – of God.

An example comes from the life of Helen Keller, whose book *Light in My Darkness* tells of her spiritual journey that was guided by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

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 questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of Swedenborg's 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.

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.

Her spiritual comprehension was profound. When we talk about God's light in our darkness, most of us are using the term metaphorically, to refer a spiritual or emotional state. Most of us see physical light with our eyes, but encounter many periods of spiritual darkness.

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 who can see through physical eyes.

In order to see God, we need spiritual eyes; not physical ones. We need to hear God whispering in our heart; we don't need physical ears for that.

Helen wrote:

"I cannot see the stars scattered in the heavens; but other stars just as bright shine in my soul. Soul is very real and important to me."

When we despair of God's light guiding us through darkness, let's remember that God's light is inside. We may not see the divine light with our physical eyes. But we can see clearly with our spiritual eyes. So many of us have "spiritual disabilities" and are fortunate to have the leadership of one with such perfect spiritual sight as Helen Keller.

As we begin a new year in our lives, let's remember how God's creation began: with light. Let's the light of God's love shine in your heart every day.

Join in our closing song, "*I Can See Clearly Now.*" As you sing, focus on "seeing" with spiritual eyes, as Helen Keller taught us:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

*Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
it's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us welcome the inner light of the new year. Help us recognize that we can leave behind whatever has been impeding our progress, and we can open our hearts to new depth of Your light. We want to make the new year a time of "beginning anew" in our spiritual journey and in our relationship with You. Thank you for Your guiding presence in this process. Amen.