

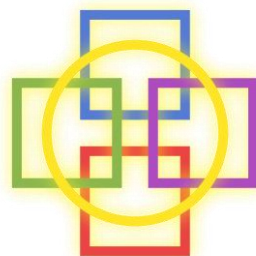


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# SERMON ARCHIVE 2018

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Swedenborgian Community Online



*Parable of the Talents by Shada Sullivan*

*January 7, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Matthew 25:13-30 (NRSV)**

"For [the kingdom of God] is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**From Swedenborg**

**Divine Love and Wisdom §240**

There are two abilities within us, gifts from the Lord, that distinguish us from animals. One ability is that we can discern what is true and what is good. This ability is called "rationality," and is an ability of our discernment. The other ability is that we can do what is true and what is good. This ability is called "freedom," and is an ability of our volition. Because of our rationality, we can think what we want to think, either in favor of God or against God, in favor of our neighbor or against our neighbor. We can also intend and do what we are thinking, or when we see something evil and are afraid of the penalty, can use our freedom to refrain from doing it. It is because of these two abilities that we are human and are distinguished from animals. These two abilities are gifts from the

Lord within us. They come from him constantly and are never taken away, for if they were taken away, that would be the end of our humanity.

## Parable of the Talents

by Rev. Shada Sullivan

Today we are reading the second of three parables that Jesus relates to his disciples towards the end of the gospel of Matthew, about living in the space between Jesus' life and ministry, and the fulfillment of the kingdom. In this parable we hear a story of a master giving his servants differing amounts of money, five talents, two talents and one talent respectively, before he leaves for a time, without specific instructions about what to do with it. The first two servants invest the money and double the amount. The master is pleased. But the third servant, out of an abundance of caution, simply safeguards the amount and returns it to the master as is. The master is not pleased at all with this, and the servant, quite harshly we might think, is cast out into the darkness.



Traditional interpretations of this parable center around the idea that God gives gifts and we are to responsibly steward them. These gifts are not just monetary, they can be all kinds of gifts and abilities. In fact, the modern meaning of the word "talent" as in referring to a special ability or aptitude, evolved from the use of this parable. In antiquity, the talent, as we have already learned several weeks ago from the parable of the workers in the vineyard, was originally a unit of weight used for monetary purposes, and a big one too...worth about the same as a day laborer's wage for 15 years. The New International Version of the bible, which we read from today, most likely translates "talent" more generally as a "bag of gold" so that it more appropriately communicates Matthew's signature tendency towards hyperbole, which we are well used to by now. The master trusted his servants with an exorbitant amount of money. And likewise, the interpretations go, God entrusts each of us with sacred and immeasurable gifts that we should not be afraid to use for the purposes of the kingdom. There is nothing wrong with this interpretation, but I think that we can take things a little further.

Because as much as this story is about responsibility, and perhaps gratitude, it is also about fear. Narratively, we might well feel sympathy with the third servant because the story is certainly prompting us to. Surely we do not think he ought to be treated so badly simply because he decided to be cautious with something that was not his own? Burying the talent might sound strange to us now but in ancient times, burying something valuable was a common way to protect it. Wasn't the servant acting prudently, at the very least? Prudence, caution, these are important virtues. We all teach our children to look both ways before we cross the road, we all teach them to balance their checkbooks. So how can prudence and caution be bad things? Well, prudence and caution can be bad things when action is instead what is needed. We all have our stories of chances not taken, apologies not given, tenderness not offered,

conversations avoided. Isn't that one of the hardest parts of being a human being in the world, figuring out when to act and when not to act? The third servant in the parable seemed to be acting a great deal out of fear, fear for his own livelihood and reputation. And such fear for the external self is not usually a good measure of whether action is required.

The Swedenborgian interpretation opens up a further moral dimension: talents represent the knowledges of good and truth, they represent things we know, "riches of the mind." [ Edward Craig Mitchell, [The Parables of the New Testament, Spiritually Unfolded](#), 2nd Edition (Philadelphia, 1900), 154, accessed 11/13/17] The first and second servants double the amount that they were given, and this represents applying what we know in our natural lives to some good use, and receiving the equivalent growth and blessing in our spiritual lives. By this process, we enter into the joy of the master, we enter into conjunction with the Lord.

The third servant simply hid his treasure, which means he did not put his knowledge to good use. Specifically, the earth represents the natural mind, so the knowledge of the third servant was at most put into the service of external, worldly motives and goals, and so did not receive a spiritual return. And we must note, it is tempting for us to perhaps get tripped up by this word: knowledge. There are many different kinds of things we know: facts, skills, proficiencies. But this story isn't talking about facts, it is talking about knowledge of good and truth, which is basically just as it sounds — knowing about what is good and what is true. Suddenly this seems a little more close to home. It is not just about being willing to put the facts we know or the skills we have to use for the kingdom, this is about having the courage to take risks for the sake of what is good and what is true. We talked last week about the "moment of meeting" the moment of standing up and responding to God's call, standing up and responding with lamps full of the oil of love for when the bridegroom comes. Here today we hear about another kind of "formative moment," when the master invites the servants to take control of some of his assets, to take responsibility for knowing something about what is good and what is true. And the question becomes: what do we do with that kind of knowledge? Will we have the courage to do good, brave, risky things, things that multiply good and truth in the world? Or will we decide to let things be, and bury our knowledge, along with our heads, in the sand.

Some scholars believe that this parable might have been directed at the religious leaders of the day, who Jesus criticized for keeping to the externals of the law, but ignoring the spirit of the law. Even though Jesus is now speaking to his disciples, we also know he had just been arguing with the Pharisees at length in the temple, and Jesus was astute enough to recognize that his disciples, who tried hard but often found themselves competing about who was the greatest...well, he knew that they would need to hear some of the same lessons as the Pharisees, they too would need to be cautioned against "interpret[ing] the law defensively in order to keep themselves pure and safe." [ Frederick Borsch, *Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1988), 106.]

The disciples would need to be cautioned as well, because survival is a powerful human impulse. From our own little enclaves of purity and safety that we have all created for ourselves, it will always seem that the risks that God asks of us are too much, what is asked of us is too hard to accomplish, that our master is a "hard man." We feel sympathy for the third servant to be under the employ of such a man, because taking risks, taking stands, can feel so scary. And yet, why did the master not seem so hard to the others? Surely the first two servants knew the master just as well. Are we to believe that they were heroes of some kind, extraordinarily brave and entrepreneurial types? Honestly, they don't seem so bold as all that, just kind of matter of fact. They aren't portrayed as heroes, just regular servants, regular people. Yet to them, the master was exceedingly generous. In this context, the third servant's excuses sound more and more defensive. How often do we all blame others for our mistakes? I can't tell you how many times I try to blame my children for ME losing my temper with them. I'm supposed to be the grown-up! And how quickly criticism from any quarter can give rise to a litany of excuses; "but this" and "but that" and "but you..." because the idea of failure feels so painful, and we cannot trust that God will bring us through it. The more defensive, the more self-oriented we are, the more we will act like the third servant, including seeing the Lord, and the path God calls us to, as unfair and impossible.



Think of the sexual abuse scandals that are going on right now, in the the fields of entertainment and politics. The events described in these cases are not necessarily current ones but rather, ones that are being uncovered from long ago. And the only reason that they remained hidden for so long is that the people who knew about it said nothing, or worse, actively covered it up. The people who had knowledge about what was happening, and knowledge that it was wrong, figuratively went and buried that knowledge in the ground. Why? Because the way that called for right action was perceived as being too "hard" just as the nature of the master was too "hard." Please understand, that I am not talking about the victims here...such abuse always takes place in a differential of power, and it is not the responsibility of the abused to take a stand. I am talking about people who shared positions of power with the abusers, even if that is something as simple as shared gender, people who were "given" a special responsibility and a trust that comes with positions of power, just as the servants were given the talents. These people buried their conscience in the ground, over and over again, justifying to themselves that it was the right and safe thing to do for their own livelihood and career. Likewise, during the Civil Rights Era, Martin Luther King Jr, in his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail, criticized white moderates for their inaction. [[Sermon Brainwave #570, Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost](#) ] He had received a public letter from a group of Birmingham clergy, people who believed segregation was wrong, but also preferred to wait for some mythical perfect future time to enact change. They called King's actions "unwise and untimely." He wrote in response: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered



unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." [ Martin Luther King, Jr, [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#), April 16 1963, accessed 11/15/17]

King could see that they were reacting defensively to the moment they were called to, they made excuses, believing culture too "hard" a ship to turn. They buried their talents, buried their knowledge of what was good and true, thinking that God would prefer a prudent course, projecting that hardness of heart and fear onto God, while countless of their countrymen and women suffered, and God suffered alongside.

It will probably never feel well-timed to do something we are afraid of, to take a risk that we do not relish. The self doesn't not want to relinquish its perceived safety, oh and how we guard that safety, how we guard and cherish our reputations and our appearance of success and having it all together. Just one look at the carefully curated personas on social media lays bare this compulsion.

But, Jesus tells us in the gospels, "Whoever would save their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for me will find it." In our text today "For whoever has more will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." In earthly terms, this is unfair. In spiritual terms, it is about the natural generativeness and expansiveness of love. The more we risk for love, the more we can love. The more we risk for truth, the more clearly we can see. The more we bury ourselves and our consciences in the earth, the smaller and darker our worldview will become, the less we will see, the less we can love.

Our reading for today tells us that the Lord lives in our freedom and rationality, this space of between knowing and doing, God is present intimately with us there. God lives with us in the giving of the talent, and what we decide to do with it. But if fear for the self lives in this space, then it seems like there is no room left for God, it seems like God is a hard master who has left us alone. But this is not the case. We read:

"...the Lord's dwelling within us is more intimate as we use these abilities to open the higher levels. By opening them, we come into consciousness of higher levels of love and wisdom and so come closer to the Lord. It makes sense, then, that as these levels are opened, we are in the Lord and the Lord is in us. " [ Divine Love and Wisdom ; 240]



These parables are about the fact that God is waiting too, hovering with us, anticipating for us, believing in us....ready to flow into any opening that we give....ready to turn our five talents into ten and our two talents into four...to turn our fear into love, our risk into growth, our "never" into now, our "wait" into "yes."

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

## **Martin Luther King Jr. & Community**

**January 14, 2018**

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### **Micah 6**

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

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### **Divine Providence 210. (I.)**

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

## **Martin Luther King Jr. & Community**

This Monday, January 15, 2018, is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. In honor of this event, let's focus on King's extraordinary concept of "beloved community." It may seem familiar to readers of Swedenborg, for our Emanuel's New Jerusalem is much the same concept. However, King describes it in passionate ways that articulate the issues of our own time.

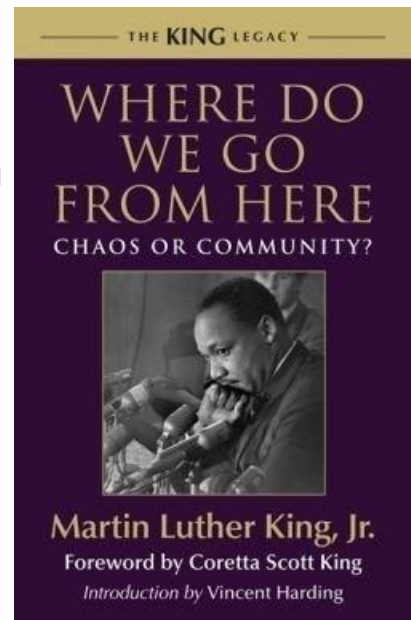
In 1956, King spoke at the Montgomery bus boycott. He had only been out of seminary for two years. Yet he put forth the astounding idea that the end goal of the boycott was *reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community.*

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 shop workers 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....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.*

And from "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," 1957:

*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.*



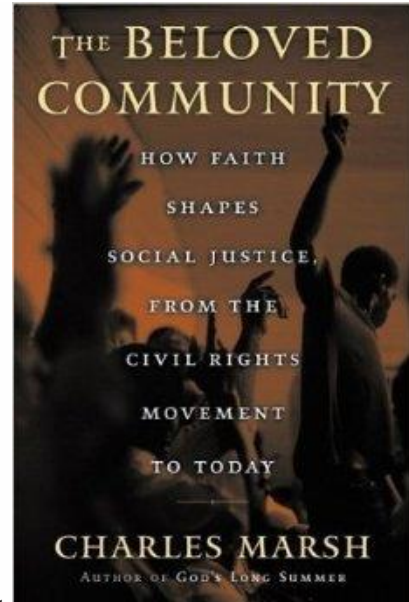
In *The Beloved Community*, Charles Marsh concludes: *The logic of King's dream was theologically specific: beloved community as the realization of divine love in lived social relation. To be sure, King's concept of love was surely not the platitudinous "all you need is love"; it was rather the passion 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.]

Many people honor MLK day by engaging in some volunteer activity that serves the needs of our community. 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:

Help me to honor Martin Luther King, Jr., and the many people past and present fighting for racial justice. Please use my hands and feet to walk to where there is need, and to serve others in love. Let me do one thing today to make the world a little bit better, in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.



*Upside Down by Sage Cole*

*January 14, 2018*

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Psalm 90:12-17, NRSV**

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O Lord! How long? Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands— O prosper the work of our hands!

#### **Mark 10:17-21**

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

### From Swedenborg



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## Emanuel Swedenborg, Divine Providence § 217

Eminence and wealth are blessings for people who do not set their heart on them and curses for people who do. To set one's heart on them is to love oneself in them, and not to set one's heart on them is to love the service they can perform and not oneself in them.

If people attach importance to themselves or their image, when this is portrayed in the spiritual world they seem to be upside down, feet up and head down.

## Upside Down, Feet up and Head down

by Rev. Sage Cole

Upside down, feet up and head down. The manner in which people are portrayed in the spiritual world who attach importance to themselves or their image. I wish I could do a hand stand for you to give you a visual image, but I'm sure you can draw this picture into your mind, a crowd of people walking on their hands, feet in the air, full of self-importance. Emanuel Swedenborg had the ability to glimpse into the spiritual world, and of the things he came back to report, some of my favorite are these wonderful depictions of how the different manners of sin we are caught up in this world are portrayed in persons in the spiritual world. Whereas on earth our inner lives are most often hidden from each other, in the spiritual world that Swedenborg describes no such subterfuge is possible. Everything on the inside, everything, is visible on the outside. And so, those like the young man with many possessions in our gospel reading this morning, those attached to wealth, to their sense of self-importance, sense of success, or ability, walk around on their hands, heads down, with their feet in the air.



This image, while colorful, and kind of humorous to consider, actually gives a very clear, straight forward depiction of what is wrong when we are attached to our own merit, our own skill, strength, importance, ability, you name it, instead of giving gratitude and acclaim to God for these gifts. When we are caught up in our own sense of merit we are placing our lowest self, our feet, in the highest position, our most natural selves are leading and controlling and naming our experience. Our minds are hanging, low down, near the earth, taking in information only from our senses, our bodily needs and desires. What will help me, satisfy me, strengthen me, and give me acclaim, accolades, glory, or even, eternal life?

The man with many possessions, who we hear about in Mark's gospel this morning, is an example of one such character who we would likely find in the spiritual world walking on his hands, feet in the air. While his concerns portray someone striving for the good, there is something inherently self-referential in his striving. He asks Jesus "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" almost as if eternal life is something he could claim, own, or



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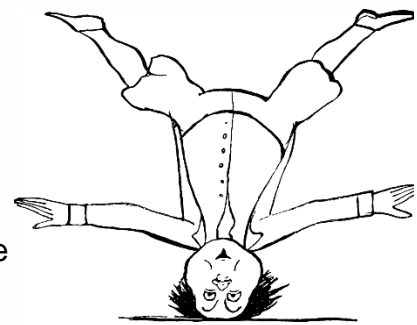
possess like any of the many other material goods he is said to own. And Jesus wastes no time in naming the perversion of this 'good seeking' behavior, chastising the young man for calling even him 'good' saying "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."

The remedy for this type of attachment to our own goodness, our own strength, is drastic. Jesus calls him to sell all that he has and give it to the poor and come and follow me. On a spiritual level the young man must sell not just his physical possessions, but all of his attachments to his own self-image, positive and negative. He must sell his sense of being the source of his own life. He must let go of his need even to achieve his own goodness.

This is a seemingly impossible task for the young man, and I would argue that it is also a seemingly impossible task for most, if not all of us as well.

I spent a day down in Duxbury with the SCYL, the Swedenborgian Church Youth League at their annual Columbus Day Weekend retreat. The theme of the retreat was *Teens in the Bible*, and one of the sessions I presented was on Cain and Abel, the first teens it seems to appear in scripture, as Adam and Eve we are told were formed straight off as adults. I bring this up because the conversation that emerged during the session centered on how this need for merit, this need for possessing a sense of success, acclaim, or most directly favor with God, is actually what motivates the first murder in scripture. It is Cain's jealousy of the favor Abel receives from God that drives him to kill his brother. If Cain had been unattached to his own self-image, if he had understood himself to be a recipient of life, this kind of comparison, this kind of competition would never have happened, or the drastic violence that results. But our human nature is such that our first instinct, the ground of our being is attached, very much attached to our own self image. This is the source of much anger, discord, and lack of cooperation, violence and strife. This is our spiritual heritage, this is what we are born into, but it need not be where we settle forever.

We do not have to spend our eternal lives with our feet in the air walking on our hands! It is tiring to walk that way! And the truth is it is tiring to carry around, care for and maintain all of these possessions, all of these things that we think are ours to manage. The truth is for all of the positive attributes or successes that we cling to maintain our self-worth there are most likely a whole host of negative attributes that we hold to just as tightly. What if we were able to let it all go, and just accept ourselves as beloved children of God, and in freedom, unattached actually follow the Lord, instead of seeking to earn our way into heaven?



Jesus doesn't ask the young man to sell all he has, give what he earns to the poor and then to be poor himself. He asks him to do this and then to come and follow him. He invites this young man to enter the grand adventure, to be among his disciples, to be

close to him, to be filled in body and spirit, and to do the great work of proclaiming and living into the Kingdom of God. This is the invitation that many of us likely proclaim we are looking for, but also very likely refuse, in just the same way.

We need not be perfect. We CANNOT be perfect. But we can allow God to be perfect, and devote ourselves to doing what we can to allow God's life to work in us. It is a paradox, which requires a constant returning, because as life flows through us, as goodness or badness results we have to let whatever merit or blame go, and return again to seeking to be of service, seeking to be a vessel, seeking to sell all we have and follow Jesus.

I for one, want to go. And for me, it means there is almost always a new, large sale each weekend as the new possessions I've accumulated must again be released. But perhaps each time the sales are getting a bit smaller. And thankfully the Lord is very enthusiastic to have me with him, and always excited when I return. May we continue to return. And may we eventually stand straight, and tall, our heads in the air our feet on the ground ready to walk in the footsteps of our Lord wherever he would take us. Amen.





*Happy 330th Birthday*

*January 28, 2018*

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### Psalm 77

I cried out to God for help;  
I cried out to God to hear me.

When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;  
at night I stretched out untiring hands  
and my soul refused to be comforted.

I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;  
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.  
Selah

You kept my eyes from closing;  
I was too troubled to speak.

I thought about the former days,  
the years of long ago;

I remembered my songs in the night.  
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

"Will the Lord reject forever?  
Will he never show his favor again?"

Has his unfailing love vanished forever?  
Has his promise failed for all time?

Has God forgotten to be merciful?  
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"  
Selah

Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:  
the years of the right hand of the Most High."

I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

I will meditate on all your works



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and consider all your mighty deeds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### From Swedenborg

#### **Divine Providence #13 NCE**

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



## Happy 330th Birthday

It was the school year of 1987-88, and I was a new student at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, MA. I was excited to learn that in January of that term – 1988 -, the Swedenborg Foundation was holding a celebration of the 300th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth! I was thrilled to receive a scholarship to the celebration.



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.

Tomorrow, Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, will be the 330th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth.

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 this Sufi teaching.

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 and sing in honor of Swedenborg's 330<sup>th</sup> birthday, a brilliant man who could honor the presence of the Divine in dance, and would want science and spirituality to dance together for all of eternity!



## Concepts of Swedenborg & Physics

February 4, 2018

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

#### Psalm 100

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.  
Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.  
Know that the LORD is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his[a];  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

#### From Swedenborg

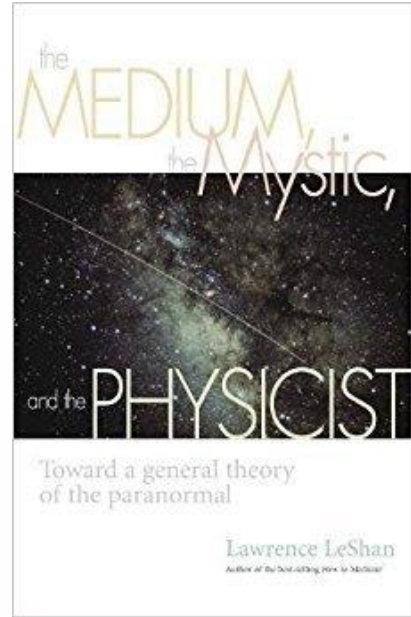
#### Divine Love and Wisdom #28

*The true divine essence is love and wisdom. If you gather together everything you know, focus your mind's insight on it, and look through it carefully from some spiritual height to discover what is common to everything, the only conclusion you can draw is that it is love and wisdom. These two are essential to every aspect of our life.*

## concepts of swedenborg & modern physics

Lawrence LeShan's book caused a stir when it was published in 1974. It was called: *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist: Toward a General Theory of the Paranormal*. LeShan's central thesis was mind-blowing: the reality being described by Quantum physicists is the same reality that has been described by mystics of all traditions throughout history, and even of "mediums" exploring the paranormal.

Many people found this thesis hard to believe at first, but were convinced by the lists of quotations LeShan gave, asking the reader to indicate what was said by a scientist, and what said by a mystic. Here are two examples. Which of these is the scientist and which is the mystic?



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*Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space would be futile because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three.*

and [2 options are given so that you have to guess you said it].

*When I, on a certain occasion, asked (Professor Einstein) or (The Lord Buddha) how he found (his theory of relativity) or (Enlightenment) he answered that he found it because he was so strongly convinced of the harmony of the universe.*

The first one is the mystic *Vivikenanda*, and the second one a scientist called *Reichenbach*, talking about Einstein.

These two groups come from different places with different goals; but end up in the same place. We know that Swedenborg incorporated both perspectives of the universe within himself. He said:

*So prayer is, quite simply, talking to God. True prayer comes from our attempt to bring a spiritual perspective to what we are praying for.*

Perhaps, then, prayer happens when we bring a spiritual perspective to the physical reality of our lives.

There is a Buddhist story that says this differently.

*It is the belief that as one searches more and more deeply into oneself, tearing aside veil after veil of illusion, one comes finally to ATMAN, the true essence of the self. And that as one searches more and more deeply into outside reality, tearing aside veil after veil of illusion, one comes finally to BRAHMAN, the true essence of reality. And that Atman and Brahman are the same.*

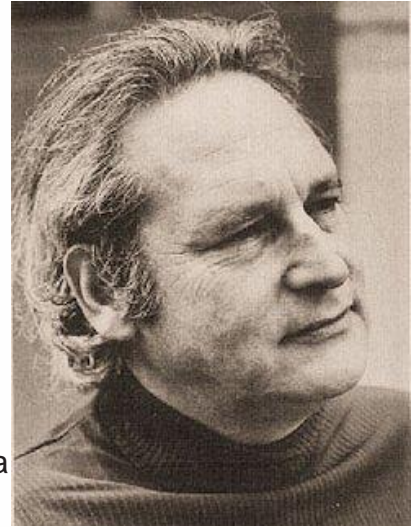


So, if both inner reality and outer reality are the same, then what is prayer? Can quantum physics help us understand prayer? Bell's theorem tells us that once subatomic particles have been in contact, they always remain connected. A change in one creates a similar change in the other, no matter how far apart they are. Some physicists believe that these events are not just limited to sub-atomic particles but are part of every-day reality -- including prayer.

Swedenborg's understanding of prayer is similar to what quantum physics is discovering in the laboratory. Prayer involves a real force -- God's inflowing love.

So, it makes sense that prayer can bring about healing, even from a great distance. How do we explain this incident?

One time Lawrence LeShan was asked to give a healing prayer, from a distance, for a man who was extremely ill. The next day the man had miraculously recovered! The doctors were astounded! Perhaps at last there was concrete evidence of healing prayer. There was a problem, however. Leshan had completely forgotten to do the healing! So did he pray unconsciously? Was the man healed by his faith in LeShan's healing? Did God hear and respond to a prayer that no one had prayed?



Another type of prayer, of course, is expressing our love of the Divine. Many of the mystics have written incredible poems/prayers of love to Divine. With Valentine's Day just a couple weeks away, we'll end with two poems of the Sufi poet Rumi:

*My God and My Love:*

*Eyes are at rest, the stars are setting.*

*Hushed are the movement of birds in their nests,  
of monsters in the sea, and*

*You are the just who knows no change;*

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

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

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

*And I am alone with Thee.*

Another poem of Rumi's

*Since I have heard of the world of Love,*

*I've spent my life, my heart*

*And my eyes this way.*

*I used to think that love*

*And beloved are different.*

*I know they are the same.*

**Let us pray:** Dear Creator, thank you for the beauty of this universe You have created for us. Help us to preserve to sustain it as we move more deeply to our love for You



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## *Swedenborg and the Sufi's on Love*

*February 11, 2018*

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

#### **1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)**

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. 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. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

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

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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 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. 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.

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

#### From Swedenborg

#### ***Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE #424***

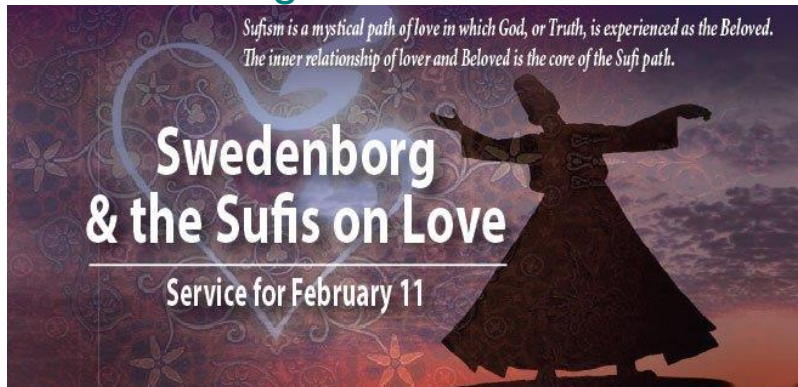
...earthly love is love for ourselves and love for the world, and spiritual love is love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. Love for ourselves and for the world looks downward and outward, and love for the Lord looks upward and inward. So when an earthly love is separated from spiritual love, it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

Just as an earthly love can rise up by levels and become spiritual and heavenly, it can also go down by levels and become sensory and physical. It goes down to the extent



that it loves being in control with no love of service, simply for love of ourselves. This is the love that we call demonic.

## Swedenborg and the Sufi's on Love



What are your plans for Valentine's Day? Will you give a valentine to someone you love? Will you give a Valentine to God?

When we think about those we love, we rarely include God on that list. We usually see our love for the Divine as completely different from our love for each other.

Yet many mystics from many traditions have written of their love for God with a fiery passion, and have expressed it in poetry. Much of the mystical poetry of the world is a kind of valentine to God expressing a passionate love.

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

A modern Sufi leader writes this:

*"Sufism is a mystical path of love in which God, or Truth, is experienced as the Beloved. The inner relationship of lover and Beloved is the core of the Sufi path. "*

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  
*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.*

These Sufi poems put loving God in the same category as loving humans.

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.

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

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

*The source of my grief and loneliness is deep in my breast  
This is a disease no doctor can cure.  
Only union with the Friend can cure it.*

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 Rustam 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.*

For Swedenborg, the joy of feeling one with God, or the agony of feeling separate, are not particularly important in daily life. Our actions are more important than our feelings; and we express love by loving uses for others.

We serve God moment by moment in our lives, even when we don't feel God's presence. A common earthly experience is two humans feeling deep romantic love for each other, and committing themselves to a life together. As the years pass, the feeling of romance is not present at every moment, yet they find a deeper love in the sharing of life's daily experiences.

We might sometimes have moments of feeling God's love for us so intensely, that we are thrilled to serve God in our lives. Then, much of life is lived with uncertainty as to where God is. Then, we may feel the despair of the one whose Lover is lost. Many days we feel neither love nor loss; just no sense of God – so we simply do our best to live the day as we think God wants.



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 sometimes forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us. We may not feel this every moment of every day. But that's what Valentine's Day is for – to remind ourselves both of our love for each other, and the intense love of God that flows into us at every moment; whether or not we are aware of it. Perhaps on Valentine's Day you can plan some quality time with God.



## **Swedenborg & Holographic Healing**

**February 18, 2018**

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### **Psalm 65:9-13**

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

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### **Heaven and Hell, #297**

Further, in regard to the union of heaven with the human race, it should be realized that the Lord himself is flowing into every individual according to heaven's design – into the individual's most inward and most outward [aspects] alike. ... The former inflow of the Lord is called direct inflow, while the other inflow, which happens to means of spirits, is called indirect inflow ..."

## **Swedenborg & Holographic Healing**

Let's continue with our series on Swedenborg's impact on the world today with a view of healing.

William Blake was inspired by Swedenborg when he wrote this:

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

Rev. Dr. George Dole, renowned Swedenborgian scholar, says that that verse reflects this statement from Swedenborg:

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

Dole has found that his study of Swedenborg has led him to explore a concept from the "new physics": the hologram. He has read works of quantum physicists such as Karl Pribram and David Bohm. They said that the new physics showed the universe to be a

hologram. Dole wrote:

*The result of all this is that I am coming to see Swedenborg's theology different than I did before. I am coming to see it composed of a central holographic concept ...*  
[Sorting Things Out, 77]

Michael Talbot is a quantum physicist who was raised in a Swedenborgian household. He has written about the connection between Swedenborg and the new physics:

*"If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is very likely that he would consider many of findings of the 'new physics' compatible with his own thought. This is surprising, for many of the concepts arrived at by contemporary physics are so foreign to everyday ways of thinking that it is difficult for modern sensibilities to grasp them." That a man born three centuries ago should articulate them in his writings is nothing short of remarkable.*" [A Continuing Vision, p. 443]



Talbot points out that in human history, we have tended to understand something by taking it apart to look at the pieces that make up the whole. However, in a holographic model, taking something apart gives us little models of the wholeness.

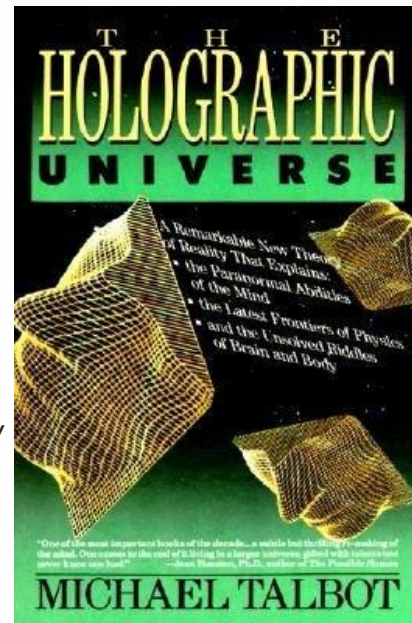
Famed scientist Karl Pribram was the first to make a connection between holographic concepts and the brain. His work suggests that even if one part of the brain is damaged, its function exists in every other part of the brain.

Bohm applied the concept to the entire universe. Talbot wrote:

*This then is the holographic paradigm, that both the brain and reality itself are holographic, and ... it is a tribute to Swedenborg's visionary genius that they were already a part of his body of ideas. The universe is a whole, and cannot be broken down into parts.*

This means that all things are connected. Talbot said:  
*...perhaps the most astonishing fore-shadowing of new physics concepts in Swedenborg's writings are the similarities between his world view and a revolutionary new way of looking at nature known as the 'holographic paradigm.* [444]

George Dole offered this summary of this conclusion in his book *Sorting Things Out*: the fact of the hologram enables us to lift out of the mass of Swedenborg's theological corpus a consistent theme



centering in the image of intersecting flows. In another chapter of the same book, he added:

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

Dole has now moved the conversation clearly into the realm of consciousness and human interaction, and into the realm of transpersonal psychology.

Questions about the relationship between quantum physics and transpersonal psychology have been debated in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* since its inception in 1969. Pribram was part of a conversation with Jacob Needleman in 1978 in which they probed the practical realities of living with quantum consciousness. This conversation put forth the same ethical questions that were intriguing Dole.

Needleman asked:

*What would be the role of an idea, like a holographic idea, in actually activating a different way of life? When Buddha came with the idea, or Christ came with Christian formulation of the idea that the personality or the ego is not ultimately real, it didn't seem that more than a few people were able to bring that idea into their own tissues, into their blood, and their life. The problem is ... how to incarnate that idea in my actual life so that I am transformed in the light of that idea.*

The conversation is moving into the arena of ethics that Dole has considered.

Bohm says:

*We say we want to change society, but if all the things that are going on around us are only the manifestations of the ground of society, what is this ground itself? The world of society is primarily the outcome of this deep layer of consciousness. Only when that is touched will society change. When that is touched, you touch the whole consciousness of mankind.*

Every event of every day, no matter how small, is part of the wholeness of life. My life is not just about "me" – it is also about "you" – and you and you and you. What I do impacts you at a subatomic level and vice versa.

In what ways does your life help impact the healing journeys of other people?

Let us pray: Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Help us open our hearts to the gift of your healing, and help us share holographic healing with others. Amen





## *Holographic Social Justice*

*February 25, 2018*

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

##### **John 14: 15-21**

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be[c] in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

#### From Swedenborg

##### **The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 36**

We are so created as to be in the spiritual world and in the natural world at the same time. The spiritual world is where angels are, and the natural world is where mortals are. And since we are created in this way, we have been given an internal and an external-- an internal through our involvement in the spiritual world, and an external through our involvement in the natural world. Our internal is what is called the inner person, and our external is what is called the outer person.

## Holographic Social Justice

What is "Holographic Social Justice?" It is looking at the world as a hologram, and realizing that we are all part of a whole.

Swedenborg's theology is one of inter-connection. Swedenborgian scholar Rev. Dr. George Dole sees it as a holographic description of reality.

In his book, ***Sorting Things Out***, Dole writes that he came to see Swedenborg's theology differently through reading the work of physicists Karl Pribram and David Bohm on the subject of the hologram.

"It attracted me because it contained statements that reminded me of statements in *Divine Love and Wisdom*. These were statements that I had taken as presumably true in a philosophical sense, but as basically incomprehensible, statements such as "The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things."

-George Dole, *Sorting Things Out*



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This reminded him of the William Blake poem:

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

We tend to think of our inner and outer selves as two different things. Swedenborg wrote:

*We are so created as to be in the spiritual world and in the natural world at the same time. The spiritual world is where angels are, and the natural world is where mortals are. And since we are created in this way, we have been given an internal and an external-- an internal through our involvement in the spiritual world, and an external through our involvement in the natural world. Our internal is what is called the inner person, and our external is what is called the outer person.*

-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 36

But these are not two separate things – they are different characteristics of one thing. He goes on to say:

*The interiors successively flow into the exteriors, even into the extreme or ultimate and there they exist and subsist together.*

-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 47

We think in terms of "matter" and "energy." Swedenborg talks about them as form and essence. Love and Wisdom.

Yet, Swedenborg tells us that they are "distinguishably one." Although they each have some unique characteristics, they function as a unit.

This is what quantum physics is all about.

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



That means that the whole universe is in every grain of sand – and in every cell of our bodies.

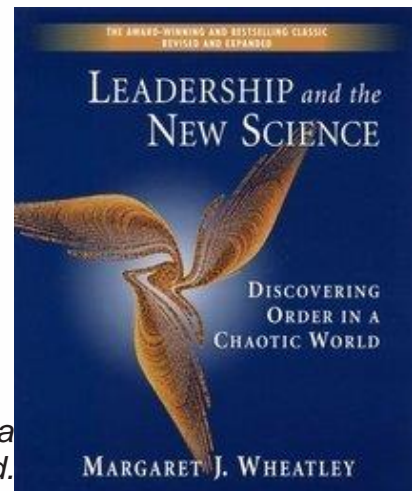
It also means that "matter" and "energy" are the same thing. They are the same wholeness with two sets of characteristics. But they are one.

Our regeneration cannot be done in isolation; it involves all of creation!  
It involves our interactions with the world.

Scientist Margaret Wheatley wrote:

*Donella Meadows, an ecologist and author, quotes an ancient Sufi teaching .... : "You think because you understand one you must understand two, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand and" (1982, 23). When we view systems from this perspective, we enter an entirely new landscape of connections, of phenomena that cannot be reduced to simple cause and effect, or explained by studying the parts as isolated contributors.*

*-Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World.*



Part of regeneration is allowing ourselves to "go with the flow" – to allow God to work in our lives in ways we don't understand. This concept gets us into "chaos theory."

We tend to think of order as one sort of thing, and chaos as another sort of thing altogether -- opposite of each other. But modern chaos theory tells us that they are same entity and neither can exist alone.

Another quote from Wheatley:

*New understandings of change and disorder have also emerged from chaos theory. Work in this field has led to a new appreciation of the relationship between order and chaos. These two forces are now understood as mirror images, two states that contain the other. A system can descend into chaos and unpredictability, yet within that state of chaos the system is held within boundaries that are well-ordered and predictable.*

*-Leadership and the New Science*

This gets us back to what Swedenborg said here:

*The interiors successively flow into the exteriors, even into the extreme or ultimate and there they exist and subsist together.*

*-The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine: 47*

That is similar to what George Dole says:

*The central implication of the holographic model in the area of ethics is both simple and radical. If I am a microcosm of the whole, this has consequences for my entire concept of the self-other relationship. The only 'you' I know is the 'you' within my consciousness. I do indeed love my neighbor as I love myself, and vice versa, because my neighbor participates in my being."*

*Dole also adds that "every polarity that exists in the world exists within me." He therefore comes to an astounding realization:*

*"In the holographic model, doing [anything] on the personal scale and doing it on the global scale are inseparable." ...*

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

What does all of this mean? We are one. We are part of a holographic oneness. If one person in the world is hungry, we are all hungry. If one person is enslaved, we are all enslaved. If one person achieves a goal, we all grow.

We can't just be "spiritual" in church on Sunday mornings. Every moment of every day, whatever decisions we make impact everyone. We do not exist in isolation; but in relationship. So every step we take in our own regeneration strengthens the spirituality of the whole! And regenerating steps taken by others elevate our own spirituality.

Let's pray.

"Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: We may not be able to understand how You work in our lives. We can't grasp the miraculous wholeness of Your creation. But we open our hearts to the inflow of Your love, and ask that You guide us daily on our pathways of regeneration – and support each other in the process.

## *Happy Birthday to a Man of Many Faults*

*March 4, 2018*

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

##### **John 1: 1-14, New International Version (NIV)**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth

#### From Swedenborg

##### **Divine Love and Wisdom (Rogers) n. 89**

From the sun arising from Divine love and wisdom emanate heat and light. The spiritual world where angels and spirits dwell has in it heat and light just like the natural world where people dwell. Moreover the heat is also felt as heat and the light seen as light in a similar way. But still heat and light in the spiritual world and heat and light in the natural world differ so much that, as said above, they have nothing in common. They differ from each other as something animate and something inanimate. Heat in the spiritual world is, in itself, animate, and so, too, light, whereas heat in the natural world is, in itself, inanimate, and so, too, light. For heat and light in the spiritual world emanate from a sun which is pure love, while heat and light in the natural world emanate from a sun which is nothing but fire; and love is animate, and Divine love is life itself, while fire is inanimate, and solar fire is lifelessness itself. We can call it that because it has not the least speck of life in it.

## Happy Birthday to a Man of Many Faults

Posted January 30, 2018 by Rev. Coleman Glenn



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January 29, 2018 marked the 330th anniversary of Emanuel Swedenborg's birth ([going by the Julian calendar, anyway](#)). In my particular denomination of Swedenborgianism, our celebrations of Swedenborg's birthday are more muted than they once were – we rarely any longer sing, "To Swedenborg, Our Wondrous Seer" (a real song, sung to the tune of "O Tannenbaum"). But blue and yellow Swedish cupcakes are still a common enough sight in New Church schools this week, and many talks and sermons this past weekend gave a nod to Swedenborg's legacy.



As I've [written before](#), those of us who believe in the Divine inspiration of Swedenborg's theological works have a complicated relationship with Swedenborg the man. We insist, with Swedenborg, that he was nothing more than a servant of the Lord; but at the same time, we look for evidence that God was preparing him throughout his life for a special mission. It's a worthy search, but one that sometimes results in a whitewashing of his life story.

Swedenborg was indeed a brilliant and talented man. But he also had faults. His scientific works contain theories and hypotheses that were not confirmed until centuries later. They also contain flights of fancy that are not supported by modern science. There is evidence that Swedenborg was a devout, charitable, hard-working citizen. There is also ample evidence that he was a little bit full of himself.

He wrote in a 1719 letter, for example,

*There are enough men in one century who plod on in the old beaten track, while there are scarcely six or ten in a whole century who are able to generate novelties based upon argument and reason.*

It does not take a great leap of imagination to suspect that Swedenborg numbered himself among those six or ten men.

I remember being taken aback when I first studied Swedenborg's life in depth and noticed these hints of pride; I had apparently absorbed more hagiography than I'd realized. But the fact is, Swedenborg openly recognized this tendency in himself, and in his Journal of Dreams (written in the early years of his spiritual awakening), he wrote the following:

*I saw a bookshop, and immediately the thought struck me that my work would have greater effect than the works of others, but I check myself at once by the thought that one person serves another and that our Lord has many thousand ways of preparing every one, so that every book must be left to its own merits, as a medium near or remote, according to the state of the understanding of every one. Nevertheless, the pride at once was bound to assert itself; may God control it, for the power in His hands.*

A significant percentage of that journal is dedicated to Swedenborg's wrestling with his own pride.

And I love this. I love seeing the puffed up language, the ornateness, the worldly ambition in Swedenborg's early works and career. I love it for two reasons. First, because it punctures the kind of unhealthy hero-worship that can develop in any sect that admires a writer, try as we might to avoid it. Secondly, though, the style of Swedenborg's later revelatory work is markedly different from the style of his earlier works – much more humble, and bereft of any self-important flourish. The evidence that he underwent painful changes to write those works is more compelling evidence to me of their truth than if they were a smooth evolution from his previous writings.

And so I say, here's to Swedenborg, our wondrous seer – faults and foibles and all.

Prayer: "Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Thank you for the blessings and inspiration in the life of Emanuel Swedenborg. Help us to accept and learn from mistakes and weaknesses in the greatest of your servants, and to be more tolerant of our own weakness. Please help us gaining in our strengths every day as we move towards the New Jerusalem.



## ***Children Rising Up: Marching for Gun Control in the USA***

***March 11, 2018***

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### Luke 18:15-17

People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the **children** to him and said, "Let the little **children** come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

##### Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called **children** of God

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### **Secrets of Heaven #430**

In the Word, a little child symbolizes innocence, and charity, too, since innocence is not possible without charity nor true charity without innocence...

*The wolf will stay with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the kid, and  
the calf and the young lion and the fattened calf [will live] together;  
and a little child will lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)*

### **Children Rising Up: Marching for Gun Control**

It was lunchtime early in the week of Convention 2016. Folks at my table were chatting about the difference between Canadian and U.S. gun laws. Someone from the Social Concerns Committee said that the National Council of Churches passed a resolution against gun violence a few years back. [[link to resolution](#)]

The Swedenborgian Church of North America is one of the member communions of the N.C.C. Any of the member churches are invited to approve N.C.C, resolutions for their own denomination. We talked with our representatives to the NCC who supported this plan and helped us in making it happen. They told us that our church had never discussed or voted on the motion.

So, why not do it now? Rev. Nadine Cotton [who was chair of the Social Concerns Committee at that time] decided with the committee to bring a motion on the floor of Convention to support



the resolution from 2010 at N.C.C. Rev. Nadine gave a clear talk on the importance of member churches supporting this gun resolution from N.C.C.

Here are the minutes from the 2016 business meeting of our denomination:

*Rev. Nadine Cotton brought to the floor of Convention the following Motion: The Social Concerns Committee requests that the General Convention adopt and affirm the National Council of Churches, USA "Resolution and Call to Action on Ending Gun Violence" (May 17, 2010) and encourages the Denomination, Officers, Associations, Member Churches, Ministries and Individual Members to write letters in support of this resolution to their federal representatives. There was a friendly amendment by Herb Ziegler to strike out "adopt," and some discussion ensued as the friendly amendment was objected to by Rev Robert McCluskey who appealed for our accepting the motion as it was originally stated. The maker of the motion rejected the friendly amendment. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.*

The Swedenborgian Church of North America has raised its voice to support the NCC's resolution against gun violence!

We'll now continue to explore this topic with worship resources of [The Text This Week](#), which provides resources for the common lectionary. They also have special sections for [Use in Times of Violence](#) and [Peace Resources](#).

Give yourself an opportunity to experience the Litany below – perhaps reading aloud both parts or invite someone to read with you.

### **Litany for Gun Violence Prevention offered for use in Sunday services**

Posted Jun 14, 2016

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[Episcopal News Service] The following Litany for Gun Violence Prevention is written by the Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane, Episcopal bishop of Maine, and offered for use in liturgies throughout the Episcopal Church this coming Sunday or at any other time. The litany is available as downloadable bulletin inserts in English [here](#) and in Spanish [here](#).

A full Eucharistic liturgy, prepared by St. Mary's Episcopal Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, is available [here](#).

Giver of Life and Love, you created all people as one family and called us to live together in harmony and peace. Surround us with your love as we face the challenges and tragedies of gun violence.

For our dear ones, for our neighbors, for strangers and aliens, and those known to you alone,  
Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**

God of Righteousness, you have given our leaders, especially our President, the members of Congress, the judges of our courts and members of our legislatures, power, and responsibility to protect us and to uphold our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

For all who bear such responsibility, for all who struggle to discern what is right in the face of powerful political forces, Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**

God of Compassion, we give you thanks for first responders, for police officers, firefighters and EMTs, and all those whose duties bring them to the streets, the lobbies, the malls, and the homes where the carnage of gun violence takes place day after day. Give them courage and sound judgment in the heat of the moment and grant them compassion for the victims.

For our brothers and sisters who risk their lives and their serenity as they rush to our aid, Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**

Merciful God, bind up the wounds of all who suffer from gun violence, those maimed and disfigured, those left alone and grieving, and those who struggle to get through one more day. Bless them with your presence and help them find hope.

For all whose lives are forever marked by the scourge of gun violence, Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**

God Who Remembers, may we not forget those who have died in the gun violence that we have allowed to become routine. Receive them into your heart and comfort us with your promise of eternal love and care.

For all who have died, those who die today, and those who will die tomorrow, Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**

God of Justice, help us, your church, find our voice. Empower us to change this broken world and to protest the needless deaths caused by gun violence. Give us power to rise above our fear that nothing can be done and grant us the conviction to advocate for change.

For your dream of love and harmony, Loving God,

**Make us instruments of your peace.**



All this we pray in the name of the One who offered his life so that we might live, Jesus the Christ. **Amen.**

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It was, of all things, Valentine's Day. An ordinary Wednesday and the day's classes were finishing. Then horrifying sounds of gunfire that, in 6 minutes, left 17 dead and many more injured. The 3 adults gunned down were saving students in that moment.

Such a scene of horror in a high school on a typical day is beyond comprehension. Yet we do grasp it with sighs of inevitability. We in the states have been through so much. We have had [school shootings](#) since Colonial days. Yet they have multiplied many times since the 1999 Columbine massacre. I counted 214 from Columbine to Parkland – and 2 more since.

There are numerous reasons as to the cause, and to the solution. We fight amongst ourselves about them. But suddenly, we adults find ourselves listening to the children.

It's not the first time in modern American history that children have forged the way to justice. There was May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1963.

It was called the "Children's Crusade" and was a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement.

Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland is considered one of best educators around. He has an enormously successful career with many publications, many awards, and a reputation of opening university-level science and math to African-American students.

He was 12 and a freshman in a Birmingham high school in 1963. He learned that Martin Luther King was calling for a Children's March. Despite many parents forbidding it, 800 students [1<sup>st</sup> grade through high school] walked out of class and marched to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church. They were met by Eugene "Bull" Connor who greeted them with hoses and fierce dogs. Many of the children were jailed

The protests continued for several more days, and the hoses had more intense streams of water, the dogs were more ferocious. Pictures were taken of Bull Connor



The photos appeared in the D.C. papers the next day, catching the attention of Pres. John Kennedy and his brother, Bobby, Attorney General. After 2 and a half years of ignoring civil rights, the Kennedy administration was ready to work on civil rights legislation.

The problem wasn't solved, but history was changed in favor of civil rights.

The Parkland students continue the history of children activists for justice issues. After so many disappointments in our own lives, we are quick to say, 'Let me give you the reasons why that won't work .....

Children have fresh, clear eyes. They are not willing to listen to what won't work. They are a new generation, and they know that THEIR generation has to make a difference.

They already have a better record than their elders. They pulled off a near-miracle by persuading their state legislature to pass legislation to limit access to guns. In some ways, it's a small step. And most people like parts but hate others. It came out of compromise. Yet high school students still in shock and deeply grieving pulled this off in less than a month after being targets of shooter.



It's again time for adults to let the children lead.

Let's end with a blessing

### **Blessing in a Time of Violence**

Which is to say  
this blessing  
is always.

Which is to say  
there is no place  
this blessing  
does not long  
to cry out  
in lament,  
to weep its words  
in sorrow,  
to scream its lines  
in sacred rage.

Which is to say  
there is no day  
this blessing ceases  
to whisper  
into the ear  
of the dying,  
the despairing,  
the terrified.

Which is to say  
there is no moment

this blessing refuses  
to sing itself  
into the heart  
of the hated  
and the hateful,  
the victim  
and the victimizer,  
with every last  
ounce of hope  
it has.

Which is to say  
there is none  
that can stop it,  
none that can  
halt its course,  
none that will  
still its cadence,  
none that will  
delay its rising,  
none that can keep it  
from springing forth  
from the mouths of us  
who hope,  
from the hands of us  
who act,  
from the hearts of us  
who love,  
from the feet of us  
who will not cease  
our stubborn, aching  
marching, marching

until this blessing  
has spoken  
its final word,  
until this blessing  
has breathed  
its benediction  
in every place,  
in every tongue:

*Peace.*  
*Peace.*  
*Peace.*

— Jan Richardson



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*The Bulb in the Flower*

*March 18, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15, New International Version (NIV)  
A Time for Everything**

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

Whatever is has already been,  
and what will be has been before;  
and God will call the past to account.

**From Swedenborg**

**True Christianity 104**

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

**True Christianity 105**





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

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

## The Bulb in the Flower

I've loved the "Hymn of Promise" from the moment I first heard it. It expresses endings and beginnings that flow in and out of each other. It certainly fits right in the Easter season, into the arrival of Spring, and to a nation torn apart over differing views on politics, justice, and peace.

I've learned that TS. Eliot may have inspired some of the lyrics of the Hymn of Promise with his powerful use of "In my beginning is my end [T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets" Part II: East Coker].

The hymn was written by Natalie Sleeth, after the death of special friend.

### **Natalie Sleeth 1930-1992**

Pondering the death of a friend (life and death, death and resurrection), pondering winter and spring (seeming opposites), and a T. S. Eliot poem which had the phrase, 'In our end is our beginning.' These seemingly contradictory 'pairs' led to the thesis of the song and the hopeful message that out of one will come the other whenever God chooses to bring that about.

Her husband, Dr. Ronald Sleeth, heard Hymn of Promise shortly before he died, & asked that it be sung at his funeral.



Sleeth began studying piano at age four. She graduated from Wellesley College in 1952, with a BA in Music Theory. She received an honorary doctorate from West Virginia Wesleyan College in 1959, and from Nebraska Wesleyan College in 1990. An organist, she wrote over 180 highly successful selections for church and school. Her works include: In the Bulb is the Flower, Go Now in Peace, Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet, Joy in the Morning, God of Great and God of Small, Hymn of Promise

Sleeth died of cancer in Denver, Colorado in 1992, aged 61. She was a member of the Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas.

This moving hymn sings to me of changing seasons. The *spring equinox* (also called the *March equinox* or *vernal equinox*) falls on Tuesday, March 20, 2018, at 12:15 P.M. EDT. This event is the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere.

I live in Maine. Next Tuesday is the first day of Spring. We are predicted to have a big Nor'easter that day. Once again we will see our crocuses shooting up above the snow.



The beginning of Spring and the end of the winter overlap each other. In the fall we will say good-bye to summer as we embrace the impending winter.

*In the cold and snow of winter  
there's a spring that waits to be,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.*

Three days after the Spring Nor'easter is the March for Our Lives –to advocate for common sense gun control. It was just a month ago that 14 students and 3 staff were gunned down in their school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. It was a tragic end of 17 productive lives. It was the beginning of the March for Our Lives movement that will save many lives.

*3 In our end is our beginning;  
in our time, infinity;  
in our doubt there is believing;  
in our life, eternity.*

What beginnings and endings are in your life during this Easter season?

<sup>15</sup> *Whatever is has already been,  
and what will be has been before;  
and God will call the past to account.*



*Palm Sunday 2018*

*March 25, 2018*

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Luke 19: 36-40**

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

### From Swedenborg

#### **Arcana Coelestia 9212: 6**

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

## Palms for a New Jerusalem

As we approach Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter, it is a valuable time to remind ourselves of the meaning of the crucifixion as understood by Swedenborg and some of the other Christian mystics. Death of the ego is a crucial stage in spiritual growth in many traditions.



We often focus on the resurrection of Jesus in this season, but it is the death of Jesus



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that holds the crux of his mystical transformation.

His death can be seen as a profound example of how to live.

For Sufi's, the importance of allowing the ego to die is the first step in finding connection with the Beloved.

The Sufi poet Attar says:

*So long as we do not die to ourselves,  
and so long as we are identified with  
someone or something,  
we shall never be free.*

Christian mystics point to the abandonment that Jesus felt on the cross. For one who had lived a life so closely attuned to God, it is startling to realize that he cried on the cross: "My God, my God – why hast thou forsaken me?" [Mt. 27:46]

Mystic John of the Cross said that feeling abandoned is one of the first stages of the Dark Night of the Soul – it is a dying to the ego that opens the way to mystical union with the Divine.



Psychiatrist and spiritual director Gerald May wrote of this state:

*"Many people are used to a consistent and long-lasting feeling of the presence of God in their lives. It may be a distinct sense of presence; of companionship everywhere. It may happen more in relationships with children, spouse, or other beloved people. It may occur in special places such as church or in nature." To then stop feeling the presence of God this way is the dark night of the soul. May says: "...when habitual senses of God do disappear in the process of the dark night, it is because surely it is time for us to relinquish our attachment to them."*

*"...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."*

Many Christian mystics would call this a preparation for union with the Divine. "John says this realization of union is the fullness of love – so much so that a person's desire is indistinguishable from God's desire."

Swedenborg's concept for this has been translated as "conjunction," but in the New Century Edition translations, is union. In the case of Jesus recognizing complete oneness with God, it was glorification.

Swedenborg talks of this state as being "regeneration" when we are so aware of our union with God that our greatest joy comes from living in love.

*"Such is the quality of the celestial person that he/she acts not according to his own desire, but according to the good pleasure of the Divine, which is his 'desire. ..."*

Swedenborg tells us that when on the cross, Jesus experienced God's abandonment, and went to a place of utter surrender. He let go of any ego desires or hopes. He put himself completely into the hands of God. *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."* Swedenborg called this "emptying out." Other mystical traditions refer to the "death of the ego."

Glorification or union is the mystical transformation that happened on the cross. Swedenborg was very clear that the passion of the cross was not an act of salvation for sins; it was a mystical joining of human and divine. *"The passion of the cross was the last temptation which the Lord, as the greatest prophet, endured; also, it was a means of glorifying his human, that is, of uniting it with the Divine. But it was not salvation in the sense in which it is generally understood by Christians."*

This mystical perspective on the crucifixion and resurrection separated Emanuel Swedenborg from most of the Christians of his day; and probably most of today as well. He wrote about a mutually reciprocal conjunction or union that can happen for each of us within the context of our spiritual growth.

"...the union of the Father and son, that is, of the Divine and the human in the Lord, is like the union of soul and body." TCR 198

The crucifixion has a message about how to live more deeply. We need to die to ourselves to be reborn as co-creators with the Divine.

The mystics say we always are in union with the Divine. But we aren't aware of it, and don't live in consciousness of it. But we can. We can become less attached to our personal agendas and listen in quiet for God's leadings. We can claim our true essence as "co-creators" with God.

Jerry May says that our lives are not linear. It's not like we have a sudden transition into living our oneness with the Divine and are aware of that forever. Teresa says that if she is aware of that state for half an hour, it is a long time.

Instead, life is full of "little resurrections" in our lives every day. Those moments when we suddenly remember who we really are and why we are alive.

We remember that we ARE in union with the Divine. "God in me and me in God." We are already. We don't have to work at making it happen. We must stop trying so hard to ignore Spirit's gentle whisperings in our hearts. We can "let go and let God." And each moment that we allow ourselves to live with this awareness is another moment of the

mystery of the glorification.

As we experience more times of "oneness" we are not drawn to mystical isolation, according to Swedenborg, but rather to active life in the world around us. We recognize the universal call to help create a better world – the New Jerusalem.

The events of Palm Sunday and Easter week help prepare us to notice the little deaths and resurrections in our lives ... and to bring that awareness back into the world, where together we walk the path to the New Jerusalem.

Dear Creator:

Be with us as we walk the journey from Palm Sunday to the Easter Season. Help us to see Your guidance throughout this time so that we can each find our "resurrected self" in union with You. Strengthen us to take this Union into the world to facilitate our journey to the New Jerusalem  
Amen





*Easter 2018*

*April 1, 2018*

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Matthew 28: 1-10**

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There 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. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then 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." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

### From Swedenborg

#### **True Christianity 114:6**

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

## Message

### Easter 2018

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

What does that mean to you?

**Marcus Borg**, theologian gives the traditional Christian view: *The most familiar understanding of Jesus' death emphasizes its substitutionary sacrificial nature: he died for the sins of the world. This understanding is part of a larger package; namely, that all of us are*



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*sinners. In order for God to forgive us, a substitutionary sacrifice must be offered.*

He goes on to say that this is not the only Christian understanding of the death of Jesus. In fact, it was 1000 years after the crucifixion of Jesus before that concept was fully developed. In Mark's gospel, the substitutionary sacrifice theme is absent altogether.

It is also not Swedenborg's understanding of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

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

That is how there is union between humanity and divinity. Swedenborg called it the "Divine human" or the "God-man". And that is what Easter is all about: showing us the union between human and divine that unites us. Swedenborg referred to the "glorification" on the cross when humanity and Divinity become one.

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

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

Physicist Michael Talbot wrote:

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



George Dole says:

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

Dole goes on to say that this helps us understand the resurrection. *It is wholly characteristic of the divine to be wholly present in every part of creation all the time.*

The Easter story is about how human and divine became one. It is about the divine being in the smallest pieces of existence.

We ourselves determine our eternal lifestyle. It is based on how we live; not what we believe. Jesus' time on earth helped to bring heavenly love into a stronger position on earth than evil. He taught us love by how he lived his life, and how he died.

So, Swedenborg's Easter is very sacred and joyful. We can never cease to exist, because we are united with God. As the God-Human, we are always growing and changing. We have eternity in which to explore all that we can be in this universal hologram. This gift is not limited to those of any particular religion or belief; instead it is the right of all human beings to move into union with God. Jesus modeled for us how this can happen by how he lived his life.

Easter is a time to look at new births taking place inside of each of us.

Where do you feel God at work within; allowing old parts of yourself to die as new parts are resurrected?



Dear God,

Thank you for the blessings of Easter. Help us to accept the gift of new birth that is ever-present in each of us. And guide our steps out to the world, where we can all help bring the birth of Your New Jerusalem into the world, where love and peace will flow everywhere. Amen.

**When Thoughts & Prayer Don't Matter and When They Do by Rev. Thom Mulle**

**April 8, 2018**

## **READINGS**

### **From 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. \**

*-Heaven and Hell §545*

## **When Thoughts and Prayers don't matter and when they do**

As you may suspect, the title of this piece is a reference to a debate, or maybe the better word is lamentation or outcry, that's been a theme in both social media as well as main stream media. There is a sense of frustration with the phenomenon of "sending thoughts and prayers" when a tragedy strikes, and then not actually doing anything to make a change.

I find that the topic of prayer is a particularly interesting part of Swedenborg's writings, and he challenges a lot of the traditional views on what prayer is. I think he addresses a major problem in many common understandings of prayer, and something I've personally always struggled with.

Let me illustrate the issue I have from a Swedenborgian theological perspective with the idea of intercessory prayer. Say, someone I or someone in my community cares about is sick in the hospital. And we go ahead and pray for this person, for their healing, their recovery, their state of mind, etc.

Next to this sick friend is a homeless person who does not have anyone who bothers to pray for them, or even think of or empathize with their suffering.

Do we think or expect that God will choose to magically heal this particular person because we chose to say a prayer, and thus choose to bless and heal them more than the homeless person next to him? This seems to be in complete opposition to



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Swedenborg's idea of God, who cannot do anything BUT bless us, and does not withhold that blessing from anyone or anything.

***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.***

***-Heaven and Hell §545***

The same then, as one may assume, goes for asking God for forgiveness. In the Lord's prayer we ask God to "forgive us our debts". But there really is no debt that we have before God. God cannot and does not choose to not forgive us because he was never in a position to forgive.

***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 them out within ourselves and saw them, and therefore they are present before the Lord because they are present before us. The Lord was leading us in our self-examination; he disclosed our sins; he inspired our grief and, along with it, the motivation to stop doing them and to begin a new life.***

***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. He says, "They do not know what they are doing"***

***-True Christianity §539***



Now, the seeming irony of this is that Swedenborg was known to pray the Lord's prayer daily, like a mantra.

So what's up with this? If God doesn't magically intervene in our lives, or absolve us from some kind of perceived debt, what's the point of prayer? I believe that the Writings point to two distinct layers of prayer, its function, and its benefits.

First off, prayer is a tool for self-reflection. In fact, Swedenborg goes at length into the inner meaning of the different kinds of prayers and offerings described in the Old Testament. He identifies a universal need to express gratitude, remorse, change of heart, and humility. It truly is a practice that is for our sake and for the sake of our regeneration. It is an acknowledgement of our own limited-ness and the reality of Divine Love and Wisdom. By anthropomorphizing God, we enter into a relationship that we can connect to our own humanity and humility, and opens us up to divine influx. It is in a very real sense, a psycho-spiritual self-help tool.

***The Lord does not demand [humiliation, adoration, thanksgiving] for His own sake, for the Divine has no glory from our humiliation, adoration, and thanksgiving. In the Divine, anything of the love of self is utterly inconceivable-that such things should be done for His own sake; but they are for our own sake; for when we are in humility, we can receive good from the Lord, because we have been separated from the love of self, which is the obstacle; and therefore the Lord wills a state of humility in us for our own sake; because when we are in this state, the Lord can flow in with heavenly good. The case is similar with adoration, and with thanksgiving.***

**–Secrets of Heaven §5957**

Prayer is transformative, because it enables us to "get off our high horse" so to speak, to get off the pedestal of our ego/proprium, that which we claim as our own. And I can personally attest to the power of this kind of prayer. Rather than magically fixing or intervening in things, prayer, among other things, enables us to be vessels of the divine, distributors of love and wisdom, which is how God moves in the world, and blesses us by means of each other.

***With all of us, God flows into our concepts of him and brings us true acknowledgment of him. He also flows into us and brings us his love for people. If we accept only the first inflow but not the second, we receive that inflow with our intellect but not our will. We keep the concepts of God that we have without arriving at an inward acknowledgment of God. Our state is then like a garden in winter.***

***If we accept both types of inflow, however, we receive the inflow with our will and then our intellect – that is, with our whole mind. We then develop an***



***inner acknowledgment of God that brings our concepts of God to life. Our state is then like a garden in spring.***

***[Loving kindness] makes the connection, because God loves every one of us but cannot benefit us directly; he can benefit us only indirectly through each other.***

***–Heaven and Hell §457***

This idea was instrumental in drawing me to the Writings. I remember a friend of mine, who shared about the existential crisis they went through after the tragic death of a loved one. To them, as perhaps to anyone, this crushed the meaningfulness of an idea of a God who intervenes, blesses and curses. Their belief in God, in the Swedenborgian sense of the word was renewed when he reflected on the love and the wisdom, the care and concern and compassion and generosity they experienced around them in the wake of these unbelievably painful and challenging events.

But there is a second element to a Swedenborgian approach to prayer, which takes us back into the metaphysical realm. The Writings teach that in the spiritual world, which transcends but includes this realm and lies at the core of our experience of consciousness, there is no time and space, only the appearance thereof, and that close-ness, as well as distance, spiritually, are matters of affection, not physical location.

This means that we are, according to Swedenborg, constantly connected with the spiritual world and this each other, while simultaneously under the appearance of an exclusively material, earthly presence. We are in constant connection with spiritual communities, based on our internal affections and the states of mind and spirit we chose to inhabit. This puts a different spin on intercessory prayer.

I have actually heard the argument made from fellow Swedenborgians that one should not engage in this kind of prayer, since it assumes an notion of god as somehow unjust and interventionist. I'd like to respectfully challenge this position.

Let's look at the hypothetical example from earlier. Our friend is in the hospital, doing really crappy, and they're in a dark spiritual place. While we are physically apart, we can be spiritually present with them. By expressing our solidarity and empathy, and our wish for them to feel better. And if we buy into the notion of spiritual close-ness being a matter of affection and spiritual state, rather than physical location, I believe there is a case to be made for the notion that this kind of spiritual exercise creates a very real connection, which can be incredibly tangible and helpful.

But once again, it is our choosing to express love and wisdom, to open ourselves up to divine reality, that lies at the core of the process. We are not the doer, but we are the vessel through which God manifests. Too often, a reliance on overly theistic ideas of God leads us to inaction, and prevents us from embodying the divine, rather than simply evoking it.

As we engage the complexities of human life and human relationship, including the major social and political and cultural issues we are wrestling with these days, let's remember that we are called to be the hands and feet of God. And that union with God is union with each other, not some kind of religious practice or belief.

God is love and love is God. And it is through the embodiment of that love that we unite ourselves to her, and as we read in the Psalm, "Awake in her likeness".



## *Prayer as a Garden*

*April 15, 2018*

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

##### **1 Corinthians 3: 5-9**

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters are anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

#### From Swedenborg

##### **Arcana Coestia 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 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.

## Prayer with St. Teresa

Last week, we had the opportunity to appreciate the sermon of Rev. Thom Muller: *When Thoughts and Prayers don't matter and when they do.*

Today, let's look at prayer from the perspective of a Christian mystic: St. Teresa of Avila, who lived in the 1500's in Spain.

There are some similarities between Teresa's concept of prayer as "union" with God and Swedenborg's "divine human" where our humanity and God's divinity live in union.

She wrote from her own experience about how to use prayer in our lives.

St. Teresa was 47 when she finished her first detailed description of prayer, contained in Chapters 11-20 of her *Book of her Life*. Although this portrayal is less precise than she would give fifteen years later in the *Interior Castle*, it is simpler and better known. I want to share my sense of it here.

In the book of her life, Teresa likens the human soul to a garden. She says it is natural for us to want this garden to be a delight for the Divinity Who dwells there. Our role in tending our soul-garden is to water it, and the water is prayer.

Teresa says that there are 4 forms of prayer, just as there are 4 basic ways to water the garden.

### **WELL AND BUCKET: CENTERING PRAYER**

The first way 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.

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.

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.



So, one begins. One might purchase books, and read the prayers that are in the books. Or one might attend church and listen to the prayers being offered. One might try a disciplined form of meditation, and learn to sit and focus and chant a mantra.

These can go on for years. Eventually, however, they lose of attractiveness. They are empty. The prayer takes more energy than we have.

How about a water wheel and an aqueduct?

### **THE PRAYER OF QUIET: AQUEDUCT**

This is watering the garden with a water wheel and an aqueduct. It requires less work, and produces more water.

The person's will is quieter and more absorbed in God's grace. One has no desire to move.

Here are some of the things she says about the Prayer of Quiet:

The gardener obtains more water with less labor.  
The soul begins to be reconnected and comes upon something supernatural.  
In no way can the soul acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make.

This prayer is a little spark of the Lord's true love which He begins to enkindle in the soul.

If this quietude and recollection and little spark are from God's spirit and not a delight given by the devil or procured by ourselves, it will be noticed no matter how small it is.

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 than I can express.

The following is from the website of [Inner Explorations](#) .

### **THE PRAYER OF INFUSION: THE STREAM**

The third way to water the garden is to use flowing water from a near-by stream.

This way is a deeper 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 be out in the world and do charitable deeds – uses – for others. One combines Martha with Mary, so that one is engaged in both the active and contemplative life together.

There is an apparent union with God, but it is not yet complete.

### **THE PRAYER OF UNION: THE RAIN**

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.

*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?*

Teresa really cannot explain it. Has anyone ever been able to explain it? She does say the state is very brief; a half an hour is a long time.

## LIVING 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 various times and need to be open to whatever is right for us at a given time.

## SWEDENBORG'S COMMENTS ON WATER

It makes sense that Teresa would use "water" to help us understand prayer. Swedenborg, too, often talked about water.

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.

Water, for Swedenborg, was about truth and clarity.

He also had some comments on the importance of 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)*



Explore this model of prayer in your life.



## ***It's Earth Day! Take Your Shoes Off!***

***April 22, 2018***

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### **Exodus 3:2-6**

Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### ***Divine Love and Wisdom, n.77***

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

### **it's earth day! Take your shoes off!**

Go outside and take your shoes off [if it's warm enough where you are!] - feel the grass and ground under your feet. Look around you at the sky, the trees, plants and animals.

God tells Moses that this is holy ground.

Swedenborg takes the concept of "holy ground" even further by saying that God is in everything that exists.

George Dole has come to see Swedenborg's concept of "inflow" as a hologram:



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*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.*

As a holographic world, we are truly all one. We nurture ourselves by nurturing all that is around us.

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

George Dole writes in *Sorting Things Out*:

*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.*

Our faith community is an active member of the National Council of Churches. Creation Justice Ministries is a focus on the justice issues that come out of our disrespect of the environment. Creation Justice Ministries is an ecumenical organization that continues the work of the former Eco-Justice Program of the National Council of Churches.



Each year, Creation Justice Ministries focuses on a particular ecological theme chosen by our members. We highlight a number of ways individuals and congregations can celebrate and protect God's creation. We hope these ideas inspire further thoughts, conversations, and actions in answering God's call to be faithful stewards of Creation.

The theme for this year is PLACE.

As you are standing outside barefoot, look around your neighborhood. Where does your water come from? Are people planting gardens? Caring for trees and lawns? Are their parks in walking distance?

Let's start with our own "place" this year—the neighborhood where we live.

Here are some resources to help you:

#### **LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR PLACE**

- Look up what watershed(s) you work, live, and play in.
- Learn about the original peoples of your community

- Find federally recognized tribes through the Tribal Directory Assessment Tool of the Department of Housing and Development
- Find federal and state recognized tribes through the National Conference of State Legislatures ([link](#))
- Familiarize yourself with native plants and species in your area ([link](#)); plan a garden. ([link](#))
- Find out your state's [tree](#), [flower](#), [bird](#), and [other symbols](#).
- Identify local parks to visit at [www.findyourpark.com](http://www.findyourpark.com)
- Learn which elected officials shape local, state, and national policies ([link](#))

### **PROTECT THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES IN YOUR WATERSHED**

Honor Endangered Species Day every May 18. Find resources on our [website](#) and [download a toolkit](#).

### **PUBLIC POLICY ACTION: DEFEND THE ANTIQUITIES ACT**

Our public lands conserve our spiritual, cultural, and natural heritage. These places where our communities can learn, play, and pray become Sabbath spaces – both for people and for God's creation. Right now, some lawmakers are considering undermining the public policy that allows U.S. presidents to conserve our heritage: The Antiquities Act of 1906. Please urge your members of Congress to protect and uphold this important law.

[Email Congress online](#) or [print and circulate a petition](#).




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Find a resource from Creation Justice Ministries to equip you with preaching, teaching, prayer, and action materials at [www.earthdaysunday.org](http://www.earthdaysunday.org).

This Sunday, April 21<sup>st</sup> is an opportunity to worship in solidarity with faith traditions around the world. In addition to the Creation Justice Ministries, there are interfaith groups involved in Earth Day. Here is [one interfaith resource](#).

Let us pray.

Dear Divine Creator of all that exists:

Help us to look around us and see Your blessings everywhere. Give us the strength and wisdom to use Your resources wisely, sharing them with each other and preserving them for the generations to come.

## **Meanings of May Day**

**April 26, 2018**

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### **Matthew 5:14-16**

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither 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. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your charitable deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### **Divine Love and Wisdom (Dole) n. 157**

The physical world's sun is nothing but fire and is therefore dead; and since nature has its origin in that sun, nature is dead. In no respect whatever can creation itself be attributed to the physical world's sun: it is due entirely to the spiritual world's sun. This is because the physical world's sun is lifeless, while the spiritual world's sun is alive, being the first emanation of divine love and wisdom. Anything that is lifeless does not affect anything on its own, but is activated; so to attribute any aspect of creation to a lifeless sun would be to attribute the work of an artisan to the tool in the artisan's hand.

The physical world's sun is nothing but fire, with all its life removed. The spiritual world's sun is a fire that has divine life within it.

## **The Many Meanings of May Day**

Did you know that Tuesday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, is May Day? Does May Day have any meaning for you? It is a day that has been celebrated for a variety of reasons in several cultures.

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



### **FLOWERS**

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

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

### **MAYPOLE**

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



### **CINCO de MAYO**

Some think about May 5th: Cinco de Mayo. It remembers the Mexican army's unexpected victory over the French in the Battle of Puebla [May 5, 1862] during the Franco-Mexican War [1861-67]. It is especially honored in many parts of the U.S. to celebrate Mexican culture and heritage.

### **INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY**

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



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

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

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





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

## MOTHER JONES

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



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

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

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

When asked about where she lived, she said:

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

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

Once a preacher criticized Mary for holding a union meeting in "a house of God." She said:

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

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

In 1903, to dramatize the need to abolish child labor, she led a caravan of striking children from the textile mills of Kensington, Pennsylvania, to President Theodore Roosevelt's home in Long Island, New York. They carried banners saying, "We want time to play!" and "We want to go to



school!" The president refused to meet with them, but the "Children's Crusade" caught the public's attention.

She was a rousing and inspirational speaker. She often said:

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

She died in 1930, shortly after the celebration of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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

What can we learn from this remarkable life?

She fully lived the passion in her heart.

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

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

We don't know if Mother Jones had even heard of Swedenborg, but we can see in her life, a shining life shaped by efforts to put Love and Wisdom to practical uses in life.

What meaning will May Day have for you this year? Will you be a "secret angel" for a neighbor? Dance around a May Pole with friends? Join a march for International Workers Day and Mother Jones? Or perhaps wait until the 5<sup>th</sup> and join the celebration of Mexican culture with Cinco de Mayo!

Whatever feels right for you on Tuesday, let it be a day filled with at least inner sunshine – and hopefully outside as well.



*The World Is About To Turn/ Barnitz*

*May 6, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Isaiah 61:10, New Revised Standard Version**

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
my whole being shall exult in my God;  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

**Isaiah 62:3, NRSV**

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

**Luke 2: 22-40, Jesus Is Presented in the Temple**

<sup>22</sup> When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), <sup>24</sup> and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon;<sup>[a]</sup> this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon<sup>[c]</sup> came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon<sup>[d]</sup> took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup> "Master, now you are dismissing your servant<sup>[e]</sup> in peace,  
according to your word;  
<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."

<sup>33</sup> And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon<sup>[f]</sup> blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so

that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophet, Anna<sup>[a]</sup> the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child<sup>[h]</sup> to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

## The Return to Nazareth

<sup>39</sup> When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

### From Swedenborg

#### True Christianity #718 and #774 (New Century Edition)

**718.** All who are of sound mind have an endless capacity for receiving wisdom from the Lord, that is, for increasing the number of truths that constitute their wisdom. They also have a similarly endless capacity for receiving love, that is, of bearing more fruit in the form of good feelings and actions that constitute their love. This perpetual bearing of more good fruit and therefore of love, and this perpetual increase of truths and therefore of wisdom, is something that is experienced by angels, and also by people who are becoming angels.

The Lord is love itself and wisdom itself; therefore we are endowed with an endless capacity for uniting ourselves to the Lord and the Lord to ourselves. Nevertheless, because we are finite, his actual divinity cannot become an integral part of us; it can only make contact with us and affect us. For an example by way of illustration, the light of the sun cannot become part of the substance of our eye, and a sound in the air cannot become part of the substance of our ear. The light and sound can only impinge on our eyes and ears and give us the ability to see and hear. We are not life itself the way the Lord was, even in his humanity ([John 5:26](#)); we are vessels for receiving life. Life itself cannot become an integral part of us, but it can have contact with us and affect us. I have added these points to help you understand in exactly what way the Lord and his redemption are fully present in the Holy Supper.

**774.** The Lord is constantly present with every human being, the evil as well as the good. No one would be alive if the Lord were not present. Only when we let him in, however - that is, believe in him and do what he commands - does he come in.

The Lord's constant presence is what makes us rational, and what gives us the capacity to become spiritual. The light that emanates from the Lord as the sun of the spiritual world is what has this effect. We receive this light in our intellect; this light is the truth, and the truth is the

source of our rationality.

When we add heat to this light, that is, when we add love to this truth, then the Lord comes in to us. The heat in question emanates from the same sun in the spiritual world; it takes the form of love for God and for our neighbor.

The situation in which the Lord is merely present with us, enlightening our intellect, is like the presence of the sun's light in the world. Unless heat is added to this light, everything on earth remains desolate. When, however, the Lord actually comes in to us, it is like the heat that comes into everything in the spring. Since heat and light work together at that time of year, the ground becomes workable, and the seeds sprout and grow up to bear fruit. (This also illustrates the parallel between the spiritual circumstances that affect our spirits and the earthly circumstances that affect our bodies.)

## "and the world is about to turn"

by Joy Barnitz

In the United States, we celebrate the "new year" on January 1st of each year. This arbitrary date has enormous practical significance in planning our daily lives. It also marks the time when we put away the Christmas gifts, take down decorations and decide what to do with the leftovers. In our daily lives, January 1st is New Year's Day. But there are other "new years." Our Christian church year begins with Advent, usually around the first of December. Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah in September-October whereas the Chinese Lunar New Year is celebrated in January-February. Cycles of life, of seasonal work are familiar to us and we choose to mark one cycle of earth's revolution around the sun as a way to acknowledge the passage of time.

As we come to the end of each calendar year the internet provides a burst of information about New Year's resolutions: what they should be, how to keep them, etc. Two that caught my attention are both from the New York Times:

The first was "How to Make (and keep) a New Year's Resolution" - which suggests that you <sup>1</sup> "... set a goal that's doable - and meaningful too." There's even a how-to guide on planning, overcoming hurdles, find a community and what to do if you miss your goal (which happens for a lot of the resolutions people make). The article recommends making the goal Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound; SMART for short. As a consulting program manager this sounds way too much like work to me! My head started aching as I thought of having to create a schedule (and maybe a budget!) for my goals, tracking and applying monthly metrics ... I ended up needing a nap and never finished the article.!

I had better success with the second, "The Only Way to Keep Your Resolutions." in which <sup>2</sup> the author cites research that "shows that willpower ... wanes over time. ... Worse, exerting willpower can take a psychological and physical toll." What to do instead? The author cites research that shows that feeling gratitude, compassion and authentic pride in an ability or

skill heals us; these feelings slow heart rate, lower blood pressure and reduce anxiety and depression. He calls these: social, moral values. Focusing on these feelings increases staying power, willpower; the people who do this are happier and more satisfied.

Perhaps a simple way to sum this up is: willpower is increased when we focus on others, when we are part of community it's easier to "hang in there" on tough goals, during tough times. So being part of this church community means that you are already ahead on keeping any resolutions you make!

Our daily lives run on linear time, sequential time (chronos). There is another kind of time, sometimes called God's time (kairos), something occurs when it is "proper" or that all things are ready for it to occur. This is the time we experience when we are walking the path of regeneration through reflection, repentance (turning again, changing our minds), reformation and renewal of our relationship with God. The earth turns on its axis daily, it circles the sun annually, however our individual world can turn at any time. Not only when "something" happens to us externally (like a job change, gaining a new family member) but also internally when we turn again to God.

The title for this sermon is taken from the chorus of Canticle of the Turning by Rory Cooney. The words are based on Mary's song, called The Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-56), which she sings upon meeting her cousin Elizabeth and they share the good news of their pregnancies – gifts of the Holy Spirit. The chorus of the song is:

"My heart shall sing of the day you bring,

Let the fire of your justice burn.

Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near,

And the world is about to turn!"

The third line echoes lines found in the twenty-fifth chapter of Isaiah: "Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces," and in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation to John: "... and God himself will be with them, he will wipe every tear from their eyes." Prophecies of heaven on earth: no crying, no tears for the former things have passed away.

Today's Gospel reading highlights an event for which there is no support in Jewish law of this time: presentation of an infant in the Temple following purification. As noted in the Jewish Annotated New Testament, there were no purification rites required for fathers or infants in Jewish law, those prescribed for mothers occur forty days following the birth of a son. Further, "presenting children at the Temple (was) not a recognized custom." We find ourselves forgiving Luke, who was not a Jew, <sup>3</sup> for not knowing Jewish law and custom. Why then is this event included? Perhaps it is to emphasize Jesus' special status, to highlight the miracle of Jesus' birth while emphasizing that his parents are adhering to custom. Jesus is Mary and Joseph's son and they are treating him as a firstborn son is to be treated according to the tradition as Luke describes it

Or perhaps this story is included so that we may imagine ourselves waiting as Simeon and Anna had been waiting. Simeon was promised that he would see the Messiah before he died and he proclaims his joy at the fulfillment of this revelation; now he can "depart in peace." How frequently we use these words to describe our feelings of a task fulfilled! Our reading states that

Mary and Joseph "were amazed at what was being said about him;" it would be pretty surprising to find a stranger rejoicing over their child! How did Simeon know all these things about Jesus? And Anna, a widow and a prophet – one of the very few female prophets in the Bible, whose words are not preserved yet we know from the text that her proclamation is similar to Simeon's. How strange this must have seemed to Mary and to Joseph; they are beginning to get an idea of just how momentous their son's life will be. Their world was about to turn, just as the wider world would turn.

Some historians propose that Christianity is going through another great "turning;" the last was the Protestant Reformation which is anchored in Luther's nailing his "95 Theses" on the Wittenberg Castle church door 500 years ago in 1517. Diana Butler Bass, a noted church historian, <sup>4</sup> writes:

"[...] the United States (and not only the United States) is caught up in the throes of a spiritual awakening, a period of sustained religious and political transformation during which our ways of seeing the world, understanding ourselves, and expressing faith are being ... 'born again.' ... This transformation is what some hope will be a 'Great Turning' toward a global community based on a shared connection, dedicated to justice and equality, that seeks to raise hundreds of millions from poverty, violence and oppression ... Exponential change creates exponential fear along with exponential hope ... Exponential change ends those things that people once assumed and trusted to be true.

At the same time, upheaval opens new pathways to the future. Change is about endings and beginnings and the necessary interrelationship between the two." <sup>5</sup>

Into these times of darkness, Christ came, Christ comes and Christ will continue to come to each of us, forever. Jesus was "born to be our friend;" the Christ was the "light of the world" which could not be overcome. In a sermon preached here during Advent you heard: <sup>6</sup>

"Christmas is about God's desire for the well-being not merely of individual human souls, but with the well-being of humanity itself. ... Each one of us is called to live in the light, to use our giftedness and skills, our passion for those (good) things we really care about, so that we may make way for the Christ."

In the faith tradition of my formation (Swedenborgianism), I was taught that without God's perpetual presence with each individual human, we could not exist. God's love is constantly flowing into us like the air we breathe. God's presence gives us life in our body and mind and also the faculties of reason and reflection that are essential to the ability to become spiritual. The world has many loving people who are living light-filled, useful lives to the best of their ability to do so. Such people trust in God and let their inner light blossom into hope: an inner light, unique to each one of us that only we can put out if we choose to turn away from God. <sup>7</sup>

I find that embodying my intentions helps me live them afterward. As I read this prayer, please turn on your candle.

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God

And let your light shine through.

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God

And let your justice shine through.



Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God

And let your hope shine through.

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God

And let your peace shine through.

Kindle a flame within our hearts, O God

And let your love shine through. <sup>8</sup>

And we say together: Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/smarterliving/resolution-ideas> (accessed on 30 December 2017)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/29/opinion/sunday/the-only-way-to-keep-your-resolutions.html> (accessed on 30, December 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 102, footnote to Luke 2:22.

<sup>4</sup> Source <http://www.history.com/topics/martin-luther-and-the-95-theses> (accessed 15 January 2018)

<sup>5</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*. (New York, NY: HarperOne: 2013) 5-6

<sup>6</sup> Reverend Jeffrey Cheifetz, "Coming to the Light" preached at Covenant Presbyterian Church, San Francisco on 17, December 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Based on Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* No. 718 and No. 774; with thanks to Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake's sermon

"Hope in Today's World." (accessed on 30 December 2017)

<http://www.swedenborgiancommunity.org/content.cfm?id=3342>

<sup>8</sup> "Kindle a flame" is by Philip Garside. More information is available at

<https://giftsinopenhands.wordpress.com/2015/08/20/4817/> (accessed 30 December 2017)

## With a Dream in Your Heart

May 13, 2018

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

#### Revelation 21:9-14

##### The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

#### From Swedenborg

##### Apocalypse Revealed, 876: n. 879-88

*"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*

## With a Dream in Your Heart, You're Never Alone

It was 1968 and Dionne Warwick was reluctant to record the song 'Do You Know the Way to San Jose.' by songwriters Hal David and Burt Bacharach. Wikipedia says:

*In a May 1983 interview with **Ebony**, she said: "It's a dumb song and I didn't want to sing it. But it was a hit, just like [her recent Top Ten hit] 'Heartbreaker' is. I'm happy these songs were successful, but that still doesn't change my opinion about them." Though she still does not like it, the song remains one of Warwick's most popular chart selections, and she still includes it in almost every concert she performs. ....*



Warwick won her first Grammy, the [Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance](#), for "Do You Know the Way to San Jose." She told *Jet* in May 2002 that winning this award was the overall highlight of her career.

Diane Warwick and *Do You Know the Way to San Jose* wouldn't be of any particular significance to us except for two things:

1. Our annual convention this year takes place in San Jose.
2. The theme of Convention is 'Do You Know the Way?'

The convention theme is, in part, because we will be in San Jose.

Our yearly liturgical theme, in the seventh year of theme cycle, is;

### **The Year of the New Jerusalem**

the emergence of the New World:

- the Second Coming in the Spirit now
- the new world & new consciousness emerging now
- building the future: the unity of the human family in justice and peace

So, in my mind it makes sense to see our theme as "Do You Know the Way... to the New Jerusalem?"

Convention is the time we complete the theme that has been with us for a year.

So, let's look again at the words to the song:

*Do you know the way to San Jose?  
I've been away so long. I may go wrong and lose my way  
Do you know the way to San Jose?  
I'm going back to find some peace of mind in San Jose*

It seems that the singer recalls San Jose as place from the past and is trying to get back there for peace of mind.

*L.A. is a great big freeway  
Put a hundred down and buy a car  
In a week, maybe two, they'll make you a star  
Weeks turn into years. How quick they pass*



*And all the stars that never were  
Are parking cars and pumping gas*

The larger world –Los Angeles—is just a big freeway where people get a car and whiz along as the years pass quickly. So many started the journey with hope of becoming a star but are now parking cars and pumping gas.

*You can really breathe in San Jose  
They've got a lot of space. There'll be a place where I can stay  
I was born and raised in San Jose  
I'm going back to find some peace of mind in San Jose*

*Fame and fortune is a magnet  
It can pull you far away from home*

The freeway is so congested and filled with smog. But in San Jose there is peace of mind – not the magnetic pull of fame and fortune which is false hope.

*With a dream in your heart you're never alone  
Dreams turn into dust and blow away  
And there you are without a friend  
You pack your car and ride away*

*I've got lots of friends in San Jose  
Do you know the way to San Jose*

It sounds so hopeful: with a dream in your heart you're never alone. It feels like a way to live an authentic life with that dream.

But then there is the next line: *Dreams turns into dust and blow away*. So, dreams are not the authentic self—they become dust. And you have no friends.

Until you head to San Jose. THERE you have friends. You will no longer be a lonely drifter on the highway.

You will be living in a community of caring friends. You will be in the New Jerusalem!



So, carry on with your journey back to your friends. Keep the dreams in your heart. But remember they are only dreams. They will turn to dust unless you take the action to make them reality.

Don't let anything keep you from your journey to "San Jose" [aka The New Jerusalem.]

So, if you are attending Convention this summer or staying in touch with friends there -or following the events on this site—if anyone asks you: "Do you know the way?" You can respond, "YES: I do know the way. Do you?"

Let us pray: "Dear Lord, please help us each find the way to the New Jerusalem – and then hold out our hands to those who are lost, so that we can all find our way."



*May 20, 2018*

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Psalm 33**

- <sup>1</sup> Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.  
Praise befits the upright.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the Lord with the lyre;  
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.
- <sup>3</sup> Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- <sup>4</sup> For the word of the Lord is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- <sup>5</sup> He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.
- <sup>6</sup> By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.
- <sup>7</sup> He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;  
he put the deeps in storehouses.
- <sup>8</sup> Let all the earth fear the Lord;  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
- <sup>9</sup> For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.
- <sup>10</sup> The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- <sup>11</sup> The counsel of the Lord stands forever,  
the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
- <sup>12</sup> Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.
- <sup>13</sup> The Lord looks down from heaven;  
he sees all humankind.
- <sup>14</sup> From where he sits enthroned he watches  
all the inhabitants of the earth—
- <sup>15</sup> he who fashions the hearts of them all,  
and observes all their deeds.
- <sup>16</sup> A king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
- <sup>17</sup> The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.





- <sup>18</sup> Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
<sup>19</sup> to deliver their soul from death,  
and to keep them alive in famine.
- <sup>20</sup> Our soul waits for the Lord;  
he is our help and shield.
- <sup>21</sup> Our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.
- <sup>22</sup> Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.

### ***John 1:1-5***

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

### **From Swedenborg**

### ***Arcana Coelestia §5115***

'And it was as though budding' means an influx that allows rebirth to be effected. This is clear from the meaning of 'budding' - that is, bringing forth leaves, and also blossom later on - as the first stage of rebirth. The reason an influx is meant is that when a person is being born again spiritual life flows into him, even as a tree, when it starts to bud, is receiving its life through heat from the sun. The birth of a human being is compared in various places in the Word to members of the vegetable kingdom, especially trees. The reason for this comparison is that the entire vegetable kingdom, like the animal kingdom also, represents the kind of things that exist with the human being, and consequently the kind of things that exist in the Lord's kingdom. For the human being is heaven in its least form, as may be seen from what has been shown at the ends of chapters regarding correspondence of the human being with the Grand Man, which is heaven. This also explains why the ancients referred to man as the microcosm; and if more had been known about the heavenly state they would have called him a miniature heaven too. For the whole natural system is a theatre representative of the Lord's kingdom, see [2758](#), [3483](#), [4939](#).

## **Panentheism**

**by Rev. Robert McCluskey**

The writer Alice Walker once described some serious problems she has with the church and its theology. The church she was baptized and brought up in had taught black people to accept

suffering and degradation as their due. "But I did not see that they were evil; that my parents should be cursed because they were black, because my mother was a woman. They were as innocent as trees, I felt. And, at heart, generous and sweet."<sup>1</sup> Nor could she understand how her parents had sinned:

"Just because a very long time ago a snake had given a white woman an apple and she had eaten it and given a bite to her cravenhearted husband. This was insulting to the most drowsy intelligence, I thought. We recognized Jesus Christ as one of us, but a rebel and revolutionary, consistently speaking up for the poor, the sick, and the discriminated against, and going up against the bossmen. I also loved that, after Moses and Joshua, he is the greatest magician in the Bible. He was also, I realized later, a fabulous masseur, healing by the power of touch and the laying on of hands."

Thinking back to a time when her mother worked in the fields, and would occasionally pause to take a rest, Walker asks:

"What God rescued my mother? Was it the God who said women deserved to suffer and were evil anyway, or was it the God of non-judgmental Nature, calming and soothing her with the green coolness of the tree she slept under and the warm earth she lay upon? I try to imagine my mother and the other women calling on God as they gave birth, and shuddering at the image of Him they must have conjured. I think now, and it hurts me to think it, of how tormented the true believers in our church must have been, wondering if in heaven Jesus Christ, a white man, the only good one besides Santa Claus and Abraham Lincoln they'd ever heard of, would deign to sit near them. . . . It is ironic, to say the least, that the very woman out of whose body I came, whose arms still held me, willingly indoctrinated me away from herself and the earth from which both of us received sustenance, and toward a frightful, jealous, cruel, murderous 'God' of another race and tribe of people, and expected me to forget the very breasts that had fed me and that I still leaned against. But such is the power of centuries-old indoctrination."<sup>2</sup>

She lamented that her parents were not given a choice, but rather, in their innocence, embraced the inherited image of a deity that denied them their human freedom.

I strongly concur with her concerns that the Christian church for far too long was, and to some extent still is, complicit in various forms of discrimination and systems of oppression, and that its position is often supported by doctrine drawn from the literal sense of the Word. For far too long, the church divided spirit and nature, and taught that the body is a prison, and the world is a vale of tears.

At the same time, I cannot go along with her in pitting the "God of non-judgmental nature" against a "frightful, jealous, cruel, murderous 'God' of another race and tribe of people." I cannot subscribe to the belief that it is nature that in fact sustains us in our humanity.

Before science, nature and God were seen as fully united. The inner world of dreams, intuition, and imagination, and the outer world of crops, wars, and so on, were all one thing. Nature was "animated"--alive and responsive to human and divine intervention, to chants, rituals, and potions.

Even within the Christian church, a magical sense of nature remained, now referred to as miracles, which were understood as "God's magic." This thinking continued uncontested in the eighteenth century.

But the emergence of science in the last two hundred years shattered this long-lived sense of animated nature. The whole realm of nature worship, magic, superstition, fortune telling, and so on was banished, along with a God who might be petitioned to intervene in nature. No more praying to the gods of rain, sun, health, or crops. God and nature were separated, seen as utterly distinct. Even the idea of miracles, which in some sense was nature worship cast in spiritual guise, became suspect. Nature was rendered lifeless, and soon became a mere extension of human greed; God was rendered ineffective, far off, waiting for us to die before he could deal with us or communicate with us directly.

One response to this is materialism. The Russian astronauts returning from the first human space flight remarked, "We saw no angels up there!" Everything unseen is suspect; nature is all there is, because we can't see God. All that is left is a tradition of belief in a God who is somehow both vengeful and merciful, and is now forced to keep company with magic, illusion, and superstition.

Another response is to reject science and take refuge in magical or wishful thinking, a pre-scientific return to nature, to an intuitive sense of unity, health, and well-being--to live as if nature, and nature alone, sustained us. Along with this comes a rejection of the rational tradition in found religion. Walker wants to get back to nature in order to escape the rhetorical traps of the church. The whole enterprise of theology is dismissed as culturally bound and prejudiced.

The New Church teaches that we do not have an either/or choice between a distant, inscrutable God (theism) and the irrational, dispassionate forces of nature (pantheism). It is not a simplistic choice between etheric spirit and material nature. Instead, we are given the challenge of uniting and balancing the two in our lives. The best model for such unity is "panentheism": God within nature.

The very fact that human beings are able to appreciate nature as we do can be seen as evidence that we are spiritual beings. There is something in us that is able to stand outside of nature and see ourselves in relationship to it. We are one with nature . . . and yet we are also distinct from it: nature itself is unreflective; it cannot see itself as beautiful, grand, or meaningful.

Seeing behind the veil of natural creation does not take anything away from nature, but increases our understanding of it. As a covering or representative of something higher, nature reveals within it both the divine and the human--for God is a person. Beyond the sense of order, peace, beauty, power, and wonder we may feel when reflecting on the world of nature, we can

also discern the Divine Humanity that is both transcendent and immanent; above and beyond nature, but at the same time within it.

Just as the soul is the ordering spirit within our body--which "re-presents" our inner person or spirit--so there is a soul within nature, an ordering principle that forms it to some particular use, and shows forth, or represents, the spirit in material form. "The body is the mind's external" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* #369).

We appreciate nature not just for what it is, but for what it signifies. All things in nature are connected, with each part supporting and involving the whole. All things are defined by their use in the larger context of the whole. Beyond this, nature's highest use is to serve and embody the spirit--to sustain humanity, the unique instance in nature capable of experiencing genuine unity with the Divine. God and nature are linked in the human experience. The different parts of nature are but forms of use; they are formations on the material plane of the existence of divine love and wisdom flowing from God. They exist for a purpose: that there might be a joining together of the Creator with creation through the conscious human life that is supported by the world of nature.

The whole created universe reflects its Creator just as our body reflects our mind. The word "reflect" is very apt, since an image in a mirror shows how something on one plane of reality can come from and reflect something that is on a totally distinct plane. The image in the mirror exactly corresponds to or represents the person. As long as the person is there, the image is there; when the person moves, it moves. Yet there is nothing of the person's own being in the mirror. Break the mirror and it harms the person not at all. The two are utterly distinct.

Science has rendered God distant and unreal, and nature lifeless. But it has not saved us. We sense the vacuum. We sense that the god of human reason is powerless to give us what we most need and want.

Panentheism, or God within nature, allows us to gain a true perception of the relationship between creator and creation, between reality and image, between life itself and its appearance in time and space, between heaven and earth. Panentheism reveals the Divine Love and Wisdom that fashioned both in its image, and who therefore exists in and through all things.

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, Alice. *The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven* . Adapted from a speech given at Auburn Theological Seminary, April 25, 1995. Copyright ©1995 by Alice Walker

<sup>2</sup> Ibid .

## **Remembering to Remember**

**May 27, 2018**

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

##### **John 14:1, 16-31**

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence."

#### **From Swedenborg**

##### **AC 6821**

He who loves his country and from good will benefits it, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom; for there the Lord's kingdom is his country

## **Remembering to remember**

To help revive the true meaning of Memorial Day, the "National Moment of Remembrance" resolution was passed on Dec 2000 which asks that at 3 p.m. local time, for all Americans:

*"To voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a Moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to 'Taps.'"*

*Introduced in Senate (11/05/2013) S.1648 - Memorial Day Moment of Silence Act*



Swedenborgian  
Community Online  
Love, Spirit, Life

*Memorial Day Moment of Silence Act - Directs the President to issue an annual proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe two minutes of silence on Memorial Day, beginning at 3:00 p.m. Atlantic standard time, in honor of the service and sacrifice of members of the Armed Forces throughout the history of the United States. [Congress.gov]*

On Memorial Day, of course, we honor the many throughout history that have gone to war for our country to fight for some aspect of justice to help preserve our freedoms.

Memorial Day used to be called "Decoration Day." It seems to have grown up in many towns around the U.S. after the Civil War by many women's groups in the south who decorated the graves of men who died in the war. It was first officially observed on May 30, 1868, with honor to the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers. After World War I, it became a time to honor soldiers of all wars.

In 1915, inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," Moira Michael replied with her own poem:

*We cherish too, the Poppy red  
That grows on fields where valor led,  
It seems to signal to the skies  
That blood of heroes never dies.*



She then conceived of an idea to wear red poppies on Memorial Day in honor of those who died serving the nation during war. She was the first to wear one, and sold poppies to her friends and co-workers with the money going to benefit servicemen in need.

Yet, the issue is far more complicated than that. Swedenborg tells us:

*"Wars which have as an end the protection of our country and our Church are not contrary to charity; the end for which they are waged declares whether there is charity in them or not." (T. C. R. 407.)*

How does one determine whether a particular war has a just cause? Many have become conscientious objectors to particular wars and have asked to serve to some other way. Some Swedenborgians have attained this status as a result of their understanding of his writings.

Other issues of justice in war concern how we treat our soldiers and our veterans. Are we attending to their physical and emotional needs?

One of our ministers, Rev. Susan Turley, has raised important questions about how we are addressing the mental health needs of our troops.



Rev. Susan Turley, retired Associate Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Supervisor and Chaplain at the Department of Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS), spoke about her son's death in Iraq in 2006.

Her only child, Army Pfc. Keith Moore, committed suicide just two months after deploying to Iraq. The Army now calculates that for the first time since the Vietnam War, its rate of suicide exceeds that of the general population.



Keith seemed to be depressed about their mission and his role. He gave signals of being distressed. If just one person had responded to him, Rev. Turley points out, his life could have been saved.

She turns to her Swedenborgian faith to cope with the loss. She is committed to preventing suicide among other military, and tells her story frequently. The military is starting to have more material and training available on suicide prevention.

She finds a way to bring good out of the tragedy by working to change the way the military works with mental health and for us all to understand the high rates of suicide among soldiers – during and after service. Perhaps "justice" on Memorial Day is not so much about whether the cause of a particular war was just, but how we use tragedy to make our world more attuned to justice issues on all levels.



Susan talks about her journey and that of other Gold Star mothers in her film, [Broken Hearts, Lifted Spirits](#).

At 3 PM local time on Memorial Day, observe a moment of silence for all of those who have died and their friends and family. Pray that we all will work for deeper justice within our military and our society.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

Please be with all of those who have lost family or friends to war – both those killed by the enemy, and those dying at their own hands from mental illness. Help us to remember all of those who have died, and to support their friends and family left behind..

*Spiritual Astrophysics by Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence*

*June 3, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me . . . for My yoke is easy and My burden light.

**From Swedenborg**

A Swedenborgian maxim is:

"Pray as if it is all up to God, and work as if it is all up to you."

**Spiritual Astrophysics:**

*An Ode to Stephen Hawking and Swedenborg's Science of Spirit*

*-Rev. Dr. James Lawrence*

Stephen Hawking died last March. The celebrated theoretical physicist and cosmologist who long ago became entirely paralyzed died with Lou Gehrig's disease, attained a cultural fascination with a scientist that approached that for Einstein. The subject of the 2014 film nominated for best picture, "The Theory of Everything," Hawking's runaway 1988 bestseller *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, has sold more than 10 million copies and has been translated into 35 languages.

But whereas Einstein never let go of his sense of a purposeful cosmos, Hawking, who was still holding out a small possibility for purpose in *Brief History of Time*, completely abandons the prospect in his final major book, *The Grand Design* (2010). There is no purpose; before the Big Bang there was nothing; after we die, it's lights out.

Encountering mindsets like that of Hawking was a kind of crisis pivot point for Swedenborg when he was 46 years old. In Leipzig, Germany to see his *Principia* through the press, he became profoundly disturbed at the lack of belief in a purposeful creation and in continuing life beyond the physical among the intelligentsia there. He decided that a meaninglessness worldview arose from a lack of knowledge about the soul's immortality and about the divine force behind the natural world. He decided to work on that and produced right away two small books the next year. *On the Infinite and Final Cause of Creation* treats philosophically how the infinite creates finite frameworks for life production. *On the*



*Interaction between the Soul and Body* analyzes the soul-body relationship and argues for conscious immortality.

There have been at least a score of groundbreaking scientists on the order of Hawking, but most science historians would agree that the two most important paradigm-shift thinkers have been Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein.

In that same *Principia* being published in Leipzig, Swedenborg constructed an atomic theory of matter 200 years before Einstein by describing and diagramming *atoms within atoms*, such that the smaller or more fundamental particles have higher energies and move internally in increasingly rapid vortical patterns the smaller they are. The appearance of solidity is provided by the speed at which these tiny parts move, and due to the spiral form of the motion there is a polarity that explains the magnetization of solids. But solidity is largely an appearance: it is all an energy system. This model is remarkably similar to what science has subsequently been discovering. The modern atom with its rapidly circulating electrons appears to be solid in the same way he suggested. And modern physics has also realized that the smaller and smaller constituents of atoms have higher and higher energies—quarks for example possess energy in vastly greater strength than normal atomic or nuclear processes. That's Einstein.

As for Newton, Swedenborg studied him in college and tried to visit him on his first trip to England, but the Cambridge don was out of town. It was Newton's own *Principia* published the year before Swedenborg was born that proposed an invisible force called gravity. There really was something like the apple falling from a tree story, according to Newton's most recent biography Peter Ackroyd. Newton applied his second law of motion to a falling apple and concluded there was only one explanation why the apple would accelerate in motion in space: some force was being applied to it. Already convinced he had proven motion *only* occurs through force, in a flash he realized that there is an *unseen* force—which he came to call gravity—acting generally in space. He surmised this *unseen* force had to have some extension in space in which it was operating, and it was known that things fall from the highest points on earth.

Next came Newton's paradigm shift insight: if the force of gravity reaches to the top of the highest places on earth, might it not reach beyond earth to the Moon? If so, that could explain the orbit of the Moon around the earth. The Moon's movement could be a consequence of this unseen gravitational that had accelerated to the point of stability in its orbit around the earth. He was right in a very fundamental way: there is an unseen force acting upon everything in the solar system. Newton's paradigm shift is that he was the first one to argue the entire cosmos operates in an orderly causality system.

Swedenborg worked with Newton's theory to make his own famous "first" in the history of astronomy. Swedenborg memorably deduced the earliest version of the nebular hypothesis theory about the formation of our solar system. That is, the planets in our solar system are flung-off chunks of the solar mass that ultimately got captured in their great escape by gravity. The gravitational pull from the sun led finally to a stable relationship of orbits around the sun. Thus, our solar system all started as part of the sun, and Swedenborg was the first one who figured that out.

In any event, Swedenborg was so sure that material reductionists were not only wrong but tragically wrong he altered his own life trajectory. Those two little books in 1735 started a thirty-eight year journey shaping an understanding not only of physical nature but also of an order of reality senior to the physical in which lie true causes. And so he worked on a spiritual philosophy until his death in 1772.

To be seriously playful or playfully serious, as a theologian and practitioner of Swedenborgian spirituality, I'd like to propose three Swedenborgian Laws of Spiritual Motion.

### **I. A Spiritual Gravity Acts Upon our Soul without Ceasing**

Spiritual gravity is a process happening inside of us all the time, because we are unceasingly involved *in forces of attraction*. The center of our being is constantly withstanding a multitude of forces in the form of attractions and desires that exert a pull upon our will non-stop.

In a theosophy as old as time, Swedenborg sees the human soul as a place of collision of values that become the action site in a growth process. Put more directly, he believes in good and evil, in heaven and hell, as forces that are every bit as real and as lawful as math and physics. The amount of unseen force would blow our mind if we could actually "see" it somehow as an illustration in action. But the fact is, we are feeling it, and we are so used to feeling it that for many people it is not something to be noticed. It is just life.

There's good spiritual gravity, and there's bad spiritual gravity, or upward spiritual force and downward spiritual force—or, to put it in the more common way, angels and demons tug at us all the day long. As spiritual isometrics, we build muscle or lose muscle strength due to how engaged we are willing to be with working against those forces that would suck us into lower-minded and lower-hearted actions, speech, and thought.

The Ten Commandments are essentially illustrations of positive and negative attractions. Envy, covetousness, adultery, murder, stealing: these are all broad categories of how negative states of desiring, negative attractions. A tremendous emphasis is placed in Swedenborgian spiritual physics on

squarely dealing with temptation toward negative attractions. Temptation is an old-fashioned word somewhat out of vogue, but its reality and essence is an ever-present feature of the human condition.

Spiritual gravitational forces are exerted upon the essence of our being, of our consciousness constantly. We don't have to produce all the force to succeed in the midst of these forces. All the power to do so will come from God, yet there is an absolutely crucial role of solidarity with our loves and attractions that connects or disconnects us with divine power. A Swedenborgian maxim is: "Pray as if it is all up to God, and work as if it is all up to you."

### **I. Second Swedenborgian Law of Spiritual Motion: Perception Modifies Gravitational Force**

Swedenborg laid tremendous emphasis on the power of the mind to alter our spiritual reality for the better. A great deal of Swedenborgian theology can be summarized in a bumper-sticker that says, "Truth Leads." We are designed to be able to see farther than we can actualize through our wills, because our wills remain conflicted. We all can envision much higher spiritual integration than we are currently able to pull off, and that's by design: our spiritual sight is always out ahead of our capability and shines the light onto the Promised Land.

There's so many ways that this works for us. Cognitive restructuring is psychotherapeutic school of counseling that works on changing belief structures in order to change life experiences. In cognitive restructuring, we deconstruct fundamentally false ways of thinking and replace them with belief structures that empower effective living. For example, it is easy for us to develop flawed assumptions and conclusions about life from our early life experiences that we never confront and transform. Such as feeling we are unlovely and unlovable. Very common, and really no one is likely to be completely free from this sort of fear along the way. In cognitive restructuring you systematically and with intelligent intentionality shape a functional positive self-esteem that dramatically changes one's energy for life and ability to see creative ways of expressing our loves and talents in effective ways in our personal and social worlds.

Other examples abound from the schools of positive thinking or as Robert Schuller liked to call it, possibility thinking. A great example is running the four-minute mile. In addition to Hawking, another celebrated Englishman died this week: Roger Bannister, who ran in the first four-minute mile race back in the year of my birth, 1954. One of the most iconic sports milestones, runners had been stalking it for many years. But a funny thing happened after Bannister broke the record. Suddenly, within months, a couple of other runners broke the four-minute barrier, and soon lots of runners were hopping over that barrier. Were runners all of a sudden going through an axial leap in physical ability? No, they were breaking a belief barrier. Runners perceived that it could be done, and it altered their actual energies for it. We are so designed that changes in our mind can produce significant changes in the force fields of our

abilities and capacities. Or, to put it in some playful Swedenborgianese: Perception modifies gravitational force in our spiritual lives.

### **I. Third Swedenborgian Law of Spiritual Motion: In Spiritual Motion Greater Mass Produces Lesser Weight**

A final nugget about spiritual gravity is that the more we receive of God's life into our being, the more spiritual mass we have. Newton's Second Law of Motion says that Force equals Mass times Acceleration. Swedenborgian spiritual physics declares a correspondential law that says the greater our spiritual mass becomes in relation to the infinite mass of God's holy center, the more powerful the attraction—or force of gravity. Ironically, the greater the mass of the right kind in relation to the divine, the lighter we become. The weight of it all becomes lighter as we progress. It becomes less and less as if we are picking it up, and more and more as if we are being lifted up. That's due to the booster rockets kicking in for acceleration as we regenerate.

The reason is that the force pulling us back is loosening. Becoming inwardly conjoined in love for others and for God in specific moments and situations is increasingly shifting into an energy system that increasingly feels like a kind of current. We are still pedaling the cycle but it is as if a motor has become installed in the gear shaft. This is what the Jesus meant when he said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me . . . for My yoke is easy and My burden light." (Mt. 11:28-30) The more we accrue a spiritual mass of love the lighter we seem, and the swifter we flow in divine providence.

So, let us give thanks for the work of great scientists such as Isaac Newton, Emanuel Swedenborg, Albert Einstein, and Stephen Hawking. Let us appreciate the great gifts of Professor Hawking. In his own way, he marveled at the cosmos and pondered it deeply. I wonder what he is beholding now.

#### **Short Thought #1**

Ian Barbour, a professor emeritus at Carlton College who held faculty positions in both religion and in science, technology, and culture, is widely regarded as the most influential shaper of the science and spirituality conversation in recent decades. He is especially known for his taxonomy identifying the four fundamental paradigms of the interface between science and religion:

**Conflict** (Each side sees the other as basically wrong-headed and not reliant upon a truth methodology that can be trusted. Especially in place in the creationism vs. evolution argument, but can be seen in other ways historically in terms of a derisive view of the truth claims of the other side. Galileo, Darwin, Dawkins, young earth creationists)



**Independence** (Stephen Jay Gould a significant voice. Sees each conversation as discrete from each other addressing different issues entirely. Religion pursues morals, ethics, meaning and purpose questions, whereas science investigates empirical analyses of the material world),

**Dialogue** (science raises questions its methods cannot answer; religion seeks to address those questions; each possesses resources for engaging to answer "what is?" and have contributions to share with one another through which each might be amply enriched)

**Integration** (there is enough overlap between each field's endeavor for truth such that not only might a genuine search for truth in one illuminate the quest for truth in the other, but that an integration of knowledge systems from both realms could very well yield the superior approach to "what is?")

Historically, Swedenborgians have been integrationists, and so was I for the past 25 years. But during the last year, I have changed my sense of things on this issue and now put myself in the dialogue room. I don't believe I know science well enough to be an integrationist, and I know of only one Swedenborgian scientist who is working hard to be in this conversation. I feel more humility and restraint is needed from religious enthusiasts, because there is no integrity in spouting conclusions that you don't actually understand. We should all care about the truth, whatever that proves to be. However, I feel I have contributions to make from the theology side, and I believe strongly in the subject area as a potential place for personal and collective spirituality. My contribution comes in the form of this sermon: taking some science precepts and trying to find the dialogue points with theology and spirituality as I understand it.

***Question:** Do you think what we learn in science relates at all to your spiritual life? Are understandings about the material universe pertinent to your inner spiritual world?*

## **Short Thought #2**

The number of people in history who have made contributions of celebrated distinction to both science and religion is very, very small—if the standard is not mere professional competence but historical significance such that the contributions in each sphere—science and religion—would make history books. Swedenborg abides among a tiny group as few as three or four who have made such potent contributions in both spheres of discourse as to be recognized as historically noteworthy.

The principle that guided Swedenborg in his rather amazing journey of investigation, discovery, and interpretation was his search for what I like to call deep causality. It was the



pursuit of deep causality that caused him to cross over from being primarily a natural scientist into becoming a theosopher. One example of how seeking deep causes leads to powerful insights is how he came to affirm a deep cause principle he called contiguity to how our solar system was developed. Nearly all science philosophers in his day were caught up in the Cartesian split between material and immaterial realities and nearly all of the big names, such as Descartes and Malebranche and Leibniz believed in a compartmentalized cosmos and reality schema. Swedenborg, however, felt he could see that a deeper reality was likely true: that everything connected. He called this his principle of contiguity. With this as guiding insight, Swedenborg became the first person to figure out that all the bodies of our solar system originated from the same mass: that the planets were separated long ago parts from the original solar mass. He was able to theorize the solar system as one dynamic unit because he had come to a deep causality principle that everything connects, and it simply then made sense to figure out how the planets connected to the sun and to each other. They all were part of an original solar mass. He was the first one to figure that out, and he struck upon it because he was focused on deep causes.

### Short Thought #3

Swedenborg's intensive anatomical research especially on the brain led to some historically significant discoveries, such as being the first to correctly deduce the function of the cerebrum and the first to correctly deduce that the brain undulates inside the skull in concert with the lungs, not with the heart beat, which had been the conventional position. In a recent book published by MIT Press called *Brain, Vision, Memory: Tales in the History of Neuroscience*, Princeton cognitive science scholar Professor Charles Gross presents Swedenborg as an unbelievably prescient intellect working in neuroscience 250 years ahead of his time. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School, the author of the bestseller and classic work *The Relaxation Response*, confesses that Swedenborg understood the physiology of meditation two centuries ahead of his time. The fact that he also developed a raja yoga controlled breathing method of stilling the mind for concentration is not only another example of Swedenborg as a perceptive explorer of "deep causes," but also one that gave him greater capacities to perceive deep causes.



## *Hitch-hiking to the New Jerusalem*

*June 10, 2018*

### READINGS

#### From the Bible

##### **Revelation 21:9-14**

##### **The New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb**

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

#### From Swedenborg

##### **Apocalypse Revealed, 876:n. 879-88**

*"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*

HITCH-HIKING, RUNNING, AND ROLLER SKATING TO THE NEW JERUSALEM  
What is the New Jerusalem? And where Is It? Most of us have figured out how to get to San Jose for our convention this summer; thus answering the song's question ["Do you know the way to San Jose?"] with a resounding 'YES; we do!!!'

But once we get there we will have a new challenge. Our convention will be asking us to find our way to the New Jerusalem. How do we get there? How will we know when we **are** there?

I think we can find clues in the writings both of Swedenborg and of Martin Luther King, Jr. I find astonishing parallels between Swedenborg's "New Jerusalem" and King's "beloved community."

King describes his Beloved Community in passionate ways that articulate the issues of our time. Here are some examples:

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. King wrote:

*As I stood with them and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shop workers 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]*

*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 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.... 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.*

In *The Beloved Community*, Charles March concludes:

***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. [Bolding is mine]

[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.]

Rev. Dr. George Dole writes about Swedenborg's book, *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* in the Messenger article "The Wall" from 2015. NJHD was published about two years after Swedenborg finished the *Arcana*. In it, Swedenborg is looking at the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21, and Dole says:



'A New Heaven and a New Earth' means a New Church, both in the heavens and on earth. (§1)"—probably the first clear mention in the theological works of "The New Church" as we understand it. There follows a very condensed presentation of the spiritual meaning of the individual features of that city ....

Dole shows us the similarity between the two great commandments of Jesus and the writings of Swedenborg. Dole writes:

*So, breaking this down, we have:*

*Jesus replied:*

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* This is the first and greatest commandment.

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the Divine [nature] of the Lord]

*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

[Swedenborg: the life which is called charity.]

*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

[Swedenborg: the acknowledgment of the holiness of the Word]

"The law and the prophets" are the whole Word in all and each of its parts (Arcana Coelestia 1: 6632.)]

The wall of the city is mentioned five times. Its literal sense is the deeper meaning of the Word.

Dole says:

*I find the Gospels offering us the definitive perspective in the Two Great Commandments. They crystallize the message of "all the Law and the Prophets" (emphasis mine GD). That, our theology tells us, is the "one faith." That is what is contained within the wall [around the city, the New Jerusalem], what lies more or less concealed everywhere in the literal sense.*

How are we to find the meaning of the wall and the city for ourselves?

One meaning I find for living life by the two great commandments comes from King, This is my favorite King quote. It is from his "I Have a Dream Speech":

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

When King uses reference in this quote to "the new Jerusalem" he refers to a "milk and honey" view of heaven. He rejects that view, as does Swedenborg.

Neither of them is talking about the "after-life."

It is not something for us to dream about for the future; it is something we need to create **now** in **this world** by working towards greater justice and compassion.

The road map is this; loving God with our hearts, souls, and minds. And loving our neighbors as ourselves. If we truly do this, then every day we will be addressing issues of poverty, violence, discrimination, and medical care. And we will create a new world right here; right now.

It is clear that no one of us can do this alone, because it is about community. A community of humanity. Eventually, it involves all of us. It seems impossible to look at the hatred and



divisiveness of today's world and imagine it becoming the New Jerusalem. But, yet, we need to start imagining it and taking the steps to make it our reality. We need to do by taking the hands of our neighbors and asking Divine Love and Wisdom to guide us.



If anyone asks you: "Do you know the way to the New Jerusalem?" you can answer with confidence: 'YES: we do!!' If anyone asks you what transportation to take to get there, you can say: hail a cab or ride a horse or roller skate or hitch-hike or just run and jump. We'll get there with each other and God's guidance!"



**New Church Day with Cory & Wilma**

**June 17, 2018**

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Revelation 21:1-2**

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*

**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.*

## New Church Day

with Cory and Wilma

HAPPY NEW CHURCH DAY!

June 19<sup>th</sup> is New Church Day and is considered by many to be the birthday of the New Church. Why?

*True Christianity* ends with these words:

*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



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The event of Jesus returning to the earth is often called in Christianity, "The Second Coming." For many, it's a belief about Jesus coming back to earth for the faithful at the "end of time."

Swedenborg says that the events of June 19, 1770, affirm that Jesus is "coming again" every day in our hearts. Swedenborgians are not theologically awaiting the return of Christ to earth. Rather, we experience the renewal of a "second coming" every day in our hearts.

The date is generally celebrated more in the General Church than in Convention. Here are photos from a recent New Church Day on the Bryn Athyn Cathedral West Lawn.



**WILMA:** Cory, have you ever attended a New Church Day celebration like this? What does New Church Day mean for you?

**CORY:** I haven't Wilma, it's kind of a new idea for me. I'd be curious to hear what they say and share during the festivities in Bryn Athyn! I know that Swedenborg often talks about the New Church as the new stage of influx of Divinity into humanity, more specifically as the current collection of people on earth who love God, and even more specifically as a new type of Christianity.

For me, a celebration of the "New Church" would have to try to celebrate all the aspects of uplifting, pluralistic and loving work in every religion and culture. I'd want to celebrate the beauty in all people and the workings of God in all things – making all things "new!" The New Church isn't something that we can claim as Swedenborgians, but something that we should help foster and support in all creeds and in creation.

What does it mean for you, Wilma?

**WILMA:** I was raised in the Baptist Church. A really important doctrine was the "Second Coming." My understanding of it was that Jesus is coming back to earth someday to take all the faithful to heaven – all those who believe in him. We had to wait a long time to see Jesus. And you had to believe in him to be saved. That always bothered me. Why should someone born a Hindu or Buddhist go to hell because they had a religion different from mine?

As an adult, I was very happy to find I don't have to wait for a 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. The Lord is already in our hearts, regardless of our religious beliefs.

I don't like having to wait for things -- and I do like knowing that my religion is complete and fulfilled every moment!

I always feel like celebrating on June 19<sup>th</sup>. One year, when I was ministering in a parish, I brought a birthday cake to the children's talk to explain New Church Day.

**CORY:** I really love what you shared here Wilma! Thank you. I also grew up Baptist – my grandfather is a retired Baptist preacher, and it never sat right with me either that if I were born across the street with a Muslim family then I'd largely be considered damned by many Christians.

**WILMA:** I didn't know your grandfather was a Baptist preacher! I so envied my Baptist preacher and wanted to grow up and do that --- until I learned that women didn't get ordained in those days! Sounds like we were raised with similar theology.

**CORY:** Yes, and I love what you said about not having to wait for the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming! I think Swedenborg had it right that the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is a process of Christ entering our hearts and minds every day, under different names and different creeds even. God saves - no matter what you call her!

Swedenborg explores how the "name" of God or Jesus represents the qualities of Divinity, and so when scripture says to believe in the name of Jesus, or accept the name of God, it means to accept Divinity in our hearts, minds and actions. To me, this seems more important than getting a literal pronunciation right or being certain of a historical manifestation. It also allows for an open, pluralistic idea of having a relationship with Goddess! Swedenborg describes the Lord as gender inclusive, speaking to everyone through their healthy relationship with the Divine One in

all traditions. I believe in a historical, glorified Christ, but that doesn't mean everyone who doesn't is condemned or in a worse position than me.

Also, Wilma, I'm thinking about this as Father's Day. 😊

**WILMA:** Yes!! That is so important to remember. I always remember my own Father – who has long been in the Spirit world. I think of all Fathers – both in the other World and still here with us.

**CORY:** I think of my father and my grandfathers. One of my grandfathers has died and the other I just recently visited with in person, he's in his late 80's and just as much a jokester as ever. I also think of the Divine Father, our holy parent, who is deeply present in all loving acts of support and strength.

**WILMA:** Cory, I'm thinking about your ordination – less than 3 weeks away! Are you getting excited?

**CORY:** Immensely so, I still can't believe it's coming up, what a journey it's been. May we all find greater and greater ministry and worship in each moment!

**Let us pray:**

**WILMA:** Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Thank you for the blessing of Your love being alive in each of us every day. Help us be aware of Your presence in us and around us always – and help us remember that our greatest joy is to share this love with others.

**CORY:** Thank you Father, for all that you give us. For your deep love and compassion, we rejoice. Help us to continue to heal, to grow toward you, and to inspire those things in others with your strength. May we accept your gift of the uplifting, regenerative journey that you lay out for us and to be a conduit for your blessings, in this world and the other.

***Packing for Convention! by Cory and Wilma***

***June 24, 2018***

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

**Proverbs 16:8-9**

Better is a little with righteousness  
than great revenues with injustice.  
The heart of humanity plans their way,  
but the Lord establishes their steps.

**From Swedenborg**

(Find Swedenborg's writings at [newchristianbiblestudy.com](http://newchristianbiblestudy.com) or in print and free downloads  
at <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/writings/>)



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## Arcana Coelestia 1728 and 1919 [4] by Emanuel Swedenborg

1728. "And he was priest." [Genesis 14:18] That this signifies the holy of love, is evident from the signification of "priest" in the Word. There are two things which are predicated of the Lord, namely, that He is King, and that He is Priest. A king, or the royalty, signifies the holy which is true; and a priest, or the priesthood, signifies the holy which is good; the former is the Divine spiritual, the latter the Divine celestial. The Lord as King governs each and all things in the universe from Divine truth; and as Priest, from Divine good. Divine truth is the very order of His universal kingdom, all the laws of which are truths, or eternal verities; Divine good is the very essential of order, all things of which are of mercy. Both of these are predicated of the Lord. If Divine truth alone were His, no mortal could be saved, for truths condemn everyone to hell; but Divine good, which is of mercy, uplifts from hell to heaven. These are what the kings and priests in the Jewish Church represented and these likewise Melchizedek represented, as king of Salem, and priest to God Most High.

1919. [4] But after the Lord's Human Essence had become united to His Divine Essence, and had become at the same time Jehovah, the Lord was then above what is called perception, for He was above the order which exists in the heavens and from there upon earth. It is Jehovah who is the source of order, and therefore one may say that Jehovah is Order itself, for from Himself He governs order, not merely, as is supposed, in the universal but also in its most specific singulars, for it is these singulars that make up the universal. To speak of the universal and then separate such singulars from it would be no different from speaking of a whole that has no parts within it and so no different from speaking of something consisting of nothing. Thus it is sheer falsity - a figment of the imagination, as it is called - to speak of the Lord's Providence as belonging to the universal but not to its specific singulars; for to provide and govern universally but not specifically is to provide and govern absolutely nothing. This is true philosophically, yet, strange to say, philosophers themselves, including the more eminent, understand this matter in a different way and think in a different way.

## Packing for Convention

by Cory Bradford-Watts and Rev. Wilma Wake

**Cory:** As Convention draws closer it's beginning to dawn on me that I'm being ordained! I think it comes as a surprise because I don't feel much different than a few months ago, shouldn't I start to feel a ministerial energy envelop me to the nth degree? I definitely feel much more capable than a few years ago, I have a much deeper vision and I'm very excited, but shouldn't all my lingering baggage just fall away and a clear sense of mission focus my every move? Haha not quite, as you probably suspect!

Ministry is what we make of it – something that we do and intend in every moment, in a way – and, in its positive sense, ministry is something that we must cultivate. We project our deeper intentions and heart in every move we



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make, even when we try our best to hide those motives or when we don't exactly know what our motives truly are.

Consequently, we minister or cultivate the fulfillment of our deeper desires in the world no matter our profession, and a true, healthy ministry is something that often takes time to nurture, takes time and process to vet and to grow with God's help. Like any relationship, we must work on our connections with Goddess<sup>[1]</sup> and others, as well as our ability to promote the Heavenly Kin-dom!

You might notice that my definition of ministry is very eclectic and hopefully applies to you in a good way, and so my upcoming physical ordainment can only mean so much! Nevertheless, it's exciting and an amazing honor to have completed this process and vetting, and to celebrate that with our community! This passage with this community has been the truly powerful part of this for me, and the title gives me leave to serve more professionally in my calling and in connection with you all. 😊

Also, as I pack for convention and contemplate another possible move in the next few months, it occurs to me how much stuff I've gathered over the last few years! Too much to know what to do with, and my powers of organization and ability to put things into use can only go so far. I need to bring cameras and microphones for some projects during Convention and I don't know if I'm bringing everything I need or how it all get across the country!

Maybe you're similar and have collected a lot of knowledge, a lot of projects, a lot of to-dos and things, but you're not quite sure when or how it'll all get done or come into play. As scripture repeats, "Do not fear!" because as Swedenborg and our scripture today describes, the Lord is the all of order and putting things to use, whether you feel like you're doing anything with what you have or not. Material things pass away, but you, your spirit, have the infinity of the future to get back around to something – just try and be present in the moment with the tasks, reflection and growth at hand.

It may also help to acknowledge that our ability to get things done and to put things into order comes from Divinity, not ourselves! And if we feel like we fail we don't have to be so possessive of that failure either, let's just lean into God, the Princess of Peace, and doing our best going forward – which is our current, finite embodiment and reception of the Lord, by the way.

Isn't that a doozy of a commandment? "Do not fear," all things will be provided and occur in their own time. Not fearing is a tough one to truly accept and embody, but it's a gift of a law – kind of like being ordered to be peaceful in spirit. And it takes ordering, it takes the process of Order and Providence in relation to our freewill to get to that peace, to get to that place of

fearlessness, to start to receive those Divine attributes. And in this moment, all it asks of us is to dutifully pack and get ready for ordainment.

**Wilma:**

As Convention draws closer, it dawns on me that I'M RETIRING from active ministry! I have no idea what to pack for retirement. I ponder piles of books and papers and data from the on-line community. Perhaps they would be of use to Cory as he begins ministry with the on-line community?? Nah. They are from the past.. life is a flowing stream ... they'd be good for recycling. Or deleting.



I remember packing for another Convention, 28 years ago. It was 1990 and I was preparing for ordination. I knew I felt "a call," but God hadn't included any details, and I wasn't quite sure what God had in mind. I wondered if I would change in some way, but like Cory, hadn't noticed any ministerial energy engulfing me in the weeks before.

It did change me afterwards. Deeply. I don't know if it was an instant change. But I know I'm a different person at retirement than if I had never sought and accepted ordination from our church community. I look back on these years, feeling so blessed to have been allowed to serve. I don't think that the laying-on of hands at ordination was the change. But living the life of ordination has been the change. I followed "a call" that unfolded and was created over many years.

I never thought I would feel a call to retirement. But I did – so loudly and clearly. I had emergency surgery in December for a kidney stone. Afterwards, I felt Divine Love and Wisdom all around me. In an instant I knew it was time to retire from active ministry. Like the call to ordination, it will unfold its own series of adventures.

There are so many years of memories to pack into my suitcase for Convention. 28 years of ordained ministry has produced lots of stuff! But, really – why take it to Convention? Over weight luggage is so expensive! The past is flowing down a stream – and this year, like every Convention, we start making new memories!

Of course, these words are not really about Cory's ordination or my retirement. It's about YOU! What is the season in your life right now? Is your life "turning" in some way? Go with the turning, and reap the blessings that lie down the road!

Let us Pray:

**Wilma:** Dear Divine Love and Wisdom: Help us feel Your presence in the "turnings" of our lives. Give us the courage to embrace Your many turnings.

**Cory:** Yes Lord, embolden us to accept Your turnings and strength. The strength to accept the gift of each new day as we strive to continue to turn toward you. Thank you for your blessings from yesterday unto forever. Amen

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[\[1\]](#) As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.



*The New Jerusalem: Are We There Yet?*

*July 1, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From the Bible**

**Matthew 25: 31-46**

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you visited Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?'

And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'

Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, I was naked and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

And they too will reply, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

Then the King will answer, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

**From Swedenborg**

(Find Swedenborg's writings at [newchristianbiblestudy.com](http://newchristianbiblestudy.com) or in print and free downloads at <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/writings/>)



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## Divine Love and Wisdom

If love does not become deed, it ceases to be love, the deed being the effecting of its purpose and that in which it has its existence.

## The New Jerusalem: Are We There Yet?

***We are at Convention!! We found the way to San Jose!***

***Have we also found the way to the New Jerusalem? Let's look around our world ...***

Here are some highlights from recent newspapers

- [Trump sends us down a rabbit hole of white supremacy](#) by [Dana Milbank](#)
- [Trump's tax-cut scam will only deepen racism and inequality](#) by [Katrina vanden Heuvel](#)
- An emergency manager at a Texas detention facility housing hundreds of migrant children in a tent encampment said Monday that the separation of families resulting from President Donald Trump's policies "should have never happened."
- **'Zero tolerance' immigration policy 'incredibly dumb,' tent city chief says**
- [What's next? Muslims grapple with Supreme Court ruling that they believe redefines their place in America](#)
- [Opinion | Trump's travel ban is an Iran ban Video](#)
- 'Go back to Mexico': One woman's racist rant towards neighbor's landscaper



So where do we find hope?

- **Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope**

*We representatives of Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican communions in the United States, Church World Service and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, gathered together this 10th day of February, 2017, seek to join our efforts to those of other religious communities striving for the same sacred purposes, and officially declare our strong opposition to the executive order entitled "Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals." On behalf of our joint membership of 37 national member communions constituting more than 30 million Americans, we stand united in our resolve to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God in fellowship with the vulnerable, the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and all persons in need. As Americans we are a nation of displaced persons.*



- ***May 30, 2018 - NASW says plan to separate undocumented immigrant children from their parents is malicious and unconscionable.***
- ***June 17, 2018-Swedenborgian President Rev. Jane Siebert's letter to Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Condemning the separation of children from parents at the border.***

### Inspiration in Song

- OK, I can let my little light shine. What else can I do?

### Down to the River to Pray

- Anything else???

### Imagine

- And stand in solidarity with others

### We shall overcome

- And, of course, keep

### Marching in the Light of God!

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

## ***A Week Filled with Groy***

***July 8, 2018***

### **READINGS**

#### **From the Bible**

#### **Matthew 22: 36-40....the greatest commandments**

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

#### **From Swedenborg**

(Find Swedenborg's writings at [newchristianbiblestudy.com](http://newchristianbiblestudy.com) or in print and free downloads at <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/writings/>)

#### **Divine Love and Wisdom: 3**

We can get some idea that love is our life from the warmth of the sun in our world.

## **A Week Filled with Groy**

**by Rev. Wilma Wake**

What is "groy" you ask? I didn't know either until this week when I made up the word.

It's the only way I can describe this week: a mixture of joy and grief. Groy. They often go together in life. The joy was coming to Convention, being with the community, and the ordinations of Rachel and Cory and Kit's sermon as well of course as all the music .....and everything else.

The grief was realizing that my two dogs ---one who was dying -- were not being cared for in the way I had set up ....and the pet sitter could not continue to care for my dying Coconut. I spent several exhausting days on the phone and texting to rearrange things but could not. I knew I couldn't continue to participate in convention with my anxiety and stress. I left early to care for Coconut and Puff.

I cried most of the plane rides home; my stress intensified by forgetting my laptop at airport security. When I arrived home, Coconut was deceased and Puff was frightened and traumatized. We hugged tightly so relieved to be together again.

I have valued these few days at home to be with my grief and with Puff. We are grieving together and healing each other's trauma.

I feel badly about leaving convention early and missing so much.



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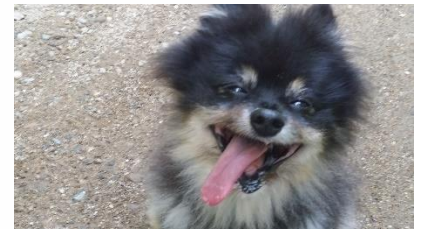
As a minister, my priority has always been my ministry. In the past I don't think I would ever have left convention early even with personal trauma. Now I knew I couldn't stay with that trauma.

It is time to retire. I realized that in December when I was hospitalized for emergency kidney stone surgery. I would have died in a few more days without surgery. I'm fine now but have some kidney impairment. I knew then that I wanted to slow down, enjoy each day more deeply.

I'm more aware of the fragility of time. At 71 I have less capacity to handle stress and I'm more aware of the needs of my body and mind.

It is a joy to be back together with Puff in our home, sitting on the grass together, remembering. A month ago, I had two little dogs and a cat. My cat died suddenly just before convention and my elderly Maltese died before I got home. That is grief. Being with Coco Puff, my remaining pet, was a joy.

Missing part of our time together at Convention is a grief. I so valued this convention and chances to be with the church family I love so much. Yet the time I did have there and the many I saw is a joy. The reality of the many conventions in the future is a joy.



Life is like that – with its mixture and joy and grief. Sometimes stress is mixed in - "Groyess"? Perhaps?

My ten years with the on-line community are filled with joyful memories; saying 'good-bye' has its sadness and grief.

Great joys have an end. You can't have joy without accepting the grief when it ends. The body and mind slow down.

The remaining joy is I am still a minister in Convention – just a retired one. I expect to be at future conventions and events. I will always remember the blessings I had in doing this ministry with you. That is joy. In the end, there is more joy than grief.

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

## *Spiritual Reflection & Meditation*

*July 15, 2018*

# READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Proverbs 4:20-27**

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

#### **Psalms 141:2-10**

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies. Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers. Their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. They will say, "As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave." But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death. Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

### From Swedenborg

Find Swedenborg's writings at [newchristianbiblestudy.com](http://newchristianbiblestudy.com) or in print and free downloads at <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/writings/>

#### **Excerpt from Apocalypse Revealed 611 [1]**

"'A horse' signifies the understanding of the Word; all the horses which you saw, signified that; for when a man goes meditating from the Word, then his meditation, at a distance, appears as a horse, noble and lively, as he meditates spiritually on the Word, and, on the contrary, poor and dead, as he meditates materially."

## ON Spiritual Reflection and Prayer

What a trip that I'm now the minister of [SwedenborgianCommunity.org](http://SwedenborgianCommunity.org)! I still haven't quite digested it or that Rev. Wilma has retired. But I'm quite honored and excited to be connecting with you all. And I guess it's not necessarily supposed to be an easy role to



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walk into, but perhaps one that should take a bit of reflection and prayer - perhaps just like life :)

Spiritual reflection is something that many of us dismiss, either directly - what's spirit? Reflect? I don't have much time for it. Or subconsciously - it just never comes to mind. Personally, I could do with a little more time to review my perspective, to meditate on my intentions, to become more prayerful, in order to truly cultivate life within and around me. All too often I find myself acting from a place of selfishness, a perspective and a motive that really pulls me down. In fact, when I fall into old habits that are almost purely oriented toward myself, I often move into a type of stupor, a place of drunkenness in a way. Like in our second song, there seems to be a dichotomy within between when I'm brooding, seeking to reign, and being spiritually unhealthy, versus when I'm meditative, prayerful and connecting with the "horizon."



Perhaps you can relate? Either way, turning our awareness to our inner life can be a powerful tool - a tool to understand ourselves better, to discern places that need transformation. And for Emanuel Swedenborg, positive transformation was a synonym for the work that Divinity does in salvation. Indeed, for the mystic Swedenborg there were two major loves that he believed make us Heavenly and spiritual-healthy when they reign in a person: love of the Lord (a love of God's qualities and personhood) and love of the neighbor (a love of truth and the goodness in others). For him, "hellish" loves are loves diametrically opposed to these when they reign in our spirits: love of self and love of materialism. However, these loves still have their place in a healthy person!

Swedenborg said that he saw the spirit realm when the Lord opened his spiritual eyes, and he defined Hell as a realm where selfishness and materialism reign as the "head" instead of serving as our "feet." In Swedenborg's visions, spirits come to reflect this backward disposition in their spiritual bodies and in the types of environments that their spirits love because according to him we always have a spiritual body that can be viewed in the spiritual realm, one that reflects our internal life instead of our physical one.

Although Swedenborg was a Christian mystic, he didn't believe that you had to be Christian to go to Heaven, or that if you were Christian you automatically "made it." In fact, we are making aspects of Heaven and Hell all the time - today, within and without - no matter our religion. If our deepest desires orient themselves towards our own dominance: selfishness, egotism, ourselves (family and friends can somewhat be viewed as extensions of ourselves, especially when they agree with us) above our love of the neighbor, love of goodness, and love of wisdom and truth, then our deepest motivations are hellish, according to him. This can especially be discerned if we burn with a hatred toward outsiders or despise those who don't clearly respect or admire us. For Swedenborg, the "fire" of Hell is more like a type of coldness, a dim, backward heat that we love, one that consumes our lives like a moth to the flame.

Ring true? For me, these insights speak volumes and help me to better reflect on my motivations and intentions. A few years ago I started to realize that my perspective and drives were generally very selfish and they weren't making anyone truly happy, including me! Further, I think that really leaning into the belief - the reflection and meditation - that our personal strengths, wisdom, and goodness comes from the Divine One within and without, can truly help us to divest ego from our living and reflecting. This is because when we acknowledge that the beauty in ourselves, others, and nature is all from the same Divine Personhood, the same source, and not from ourselves, then we don't feel like we own these things and that they're a part of the things that we should support and uplift. We should also create some distance between our sense of self and our bad habits as well, since all life is something we ultimately receive, and in this way we may feel some leverage to better accept what is healthy and reject what is not.

Further, even though some faiths will divest humanness and personhood from the Goddess above, I find that even when we do we still tend to attribute higher human qualities to the Spirit. I think this is no accident, but indicates some fundamental truths in the universe. Often, it's only when we lean too far into worldly reflection do we start to construct personal theologies that create a God with no real substance or attribute, a Divinity with no will, no understanding, and no view or care of our doings.

All-in-all, we can't help but interpret things from our human perspective, but I don't think that's a bad thing, just often turned unhealthy. I don't think it's an accident or an unfortunate habit of anthropomorphizing to see humanity in God and vice versa, but actually, a tendency that we should lean into in our daily reflecting. It helps us to see Goddess in ourselves and in others. It helps us to know that we have the strength to turn away from selfishness and destructive habits, that we are not defined by what we've done but by what we continue to choose and want to do. It also helps us to acknowledge what I think is a deeply healthy truth, one made plain throughout the universe and in physics: all things are holograms, microcosms of the greater whole - the infinitely loving, the infinitely good, Divine Person. This Divine Person and her interfaith essence loves us and is working tirelessly for the betterment and joy of all things. I think that's amazing and highlights our broader community and responsibility toward our surroundings. Let's lean into that meditation and call to action.

Let us know that we are in deep connection with each other and entire spiritual communities. Let us turn toward a more prayerful reflection and toward transformation in our hearts, our spirit, and in our embodiment. Let's meditate on what it truly means to believe in Divinity, a Spirit in the sky, in ourselves, and in each other. Let us take a moment to meditate on our breath and on these sentiments in the way that works for you...

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.



## *Employing Spiritual Practice for Personal Growth*

*July 22, 2018*

# READINGS

## From the Bible

### **Luke 8:14-15**

The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

### **John 15:5**

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

### **Psalm 92**

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, LADY; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts! Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever. But you, LADY, are forever exalted. For surely your enemies, LORD, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured on me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes. The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LADY, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

### **From Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings**

Find Swedenborg's writings as free pdf downloads at [swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore](http://swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore)

### **Apocalypse Revealed 130**

...everything connected with people's charity and faith, for these are the inner qualities from which works spring... have their growth when charity is in first place and faith in second place. For charity is a spiritual affection for doing good, and from it springs a spiritual affection for knowing truth, since good loves truth as food does drink. Indeed it wishes to be nourished, and



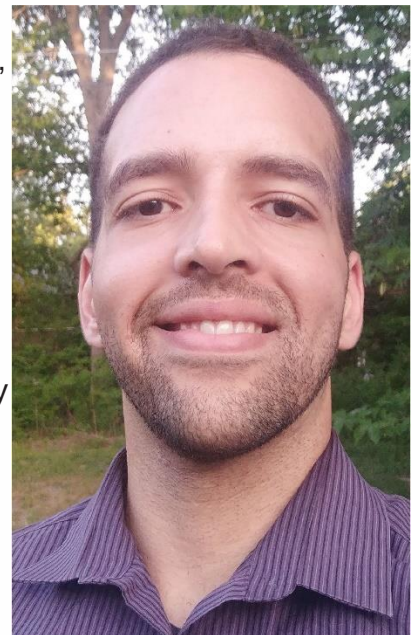
it is nourished by truths. As a consequence, people in a state of genuine charity experience continual growths of truth.

### **True Christianity 586**

That a person 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.

## **Exploring Spiritual Practices For Personal Growth**

As you might be aware, we've been reviewing and modifying our website quite a bit lately! Although this might sound monotonous, it's been quite the opposite - full of pitfalls, meditative loading screens, and some real treasures. Actually, a ton of treasures, too many to process all at once! One particular trove of treasure that recently found me was in our [Discussion Forums](#) under Spiritual Practice.



Eddie, a valued community registrant, writes there:

"I use a book of Celtic Devotions by Caitlin Matthews for my daily ritual.

"Although the 'prayers' in it are not Christian per se they do connect me with the Lord and his Divine Providence. I make sure that I focus my mind when using the devotions on recognizing that the terms used in the devotional are aspects of the Lord.

"I have used these devotions for about 5 years now and I also use the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins as part of my spiritual practice..

"Hopkins was a 19th century Jesuit who believed in 'The Real Presence' not only through Transubstantiation of the Host during the Eucharist but also the real presence of the Lord in Nature. His poem 'God's Grandeur' speaks of how the Lord is manifest in all aspects of Creation.

"When of a morning I recite His poem 'Windhover, to Christ Our Lord' which is seemingly about a Kestrel in flight it helps me to start my day in service to the Lord and to aspire to conjunction with him through my actions of the day."

Of course, this meant I had to find this poem (and listen to it, see below):

## **THE WINDHOVER: To Christ our Lord**

**Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 - 1889)**

I caught this morning morning's minion, Kingdom  
Of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding:  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! Then off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird,--- the achieve of, the mastery of the thing  
Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!  
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue --bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

And as I perused the other posts and other sections I've been struck by all the different types of spiritual practice that this community engages in. Moreover, your testimonials indicate how powerful a tool intentional spiritual practice is for personal growth and peace. Thank you for sharing!

Spiritual practice doesn't have to fit a certain mold or certain religious trapping in order to be helpful and connect us more with the Divine, ourselves, and our communities. We don't have to replicate anything specific to turn to God, but often we do have to try to turn more toward the Holy One throughout our day - Goddess will do the rest. Indeed, it

is the Lord who gives us strength to turn in the first place - that's why it's often helpful to just pray to want to turn.

I invite you to further share your spiritual practices on those boards and in community! I think people will find your insights really impactful and helpful. For me, I like to look at my work and many of my hobbies as spiritual practice. This can be when I write, when I go on a run, or when I sing. But what am I practicing for? What is spiritual growth? Isn't that arbitrary? Is it like becoming more "Zen?"

I think becoming more Zen is a way to put it. Like goodness and beauty, there may be an ultimate, infinite stage where we obtain all positive spiritual growth, but I think all we'll probably ever know is each of our subjective, finite perspective and ability to accept the gifts Divinity provides - no matter how big those become! Oh wait, each of those things - beauty, goodness, and positive growth - are all synonyms for the Savior God, in my opinion. Each of us has a somewhat different conception of Divinity, one that is hopefully in process and informing our personal reflection and spiritual practice towards accepting more Divinity within, but I often find that when we lean into practices that help us further embody and discover the Holy One within and without we're much happier, much more blessed (and a blessing) for it! Let's discover and employ these practices for ourselves, and let's help the organizations, governments, and communities that we're involved in to do the same in larger and larger ways. Further, although we shouldn't carry forward the blame or guilt of the past for its own sake, continuing to address and heal old wounds can often be an important part of all of our personal growth journeys. Just know that from a Swedenborgian lens (at least mine), God always forgives, but if we haven't changed then we are accepting part of hell as ourselves, perhaps even a core part if we are really oriented toward it. [Explore this page and our book downloads](#) if you want to learn more about Emanuel Swedenborg's strange conception and visions of [Heaven and Hell \(pdf\)](#).

I believe the mystical theologian and the unintentional namesake of our denomination, Emanuel Swedenborg, would agree that that's the goal: growing towards Divinity's qualities, accepting the process of Salvation within and without. Swedenborg had a fondness for emphasizing the verses in the Hebrew Bible where Jehovah would point out that she, the gender-inclusive God, is the only Savior, and the only source of positive growth and strength. As Jehovah says: "I am," "I am the only Savior," and "The only way to the Parent is through me:" the Parent of course being Divine Love itself, with Jesus being the incarnation of Divine Truth: Love in its interpersonal form. I think that all of this is true whatever we call the Divine personality that we approach God through: Jesus, Sophia, Krishna, Allah, your higher self, or "the Universe."

However, as you might suspect, our conception of Divinity can really impact this process of employing spiritual practice and growing. If we believe that Divinity is more interested in labels or specific rituals than love, then we tend to emulate that - condemning others to hell or berating them when they don't conform. If Divinity can only be encapsulated by our own image of him, then instead of shining with Divine Wisdom - like the Lord did in the transfiguration - the God on our altar might be just a dim picture

of ourself. And if Goddess or "the Universe" has no intentionality, no positive qualitative essence, no personhood, well, I'll let you come to your own conclusions about that one.

Thus, the core of spiritual practice for personal growth turns out to be our mindsets! In fact, almost any activity can serve as spiritual practice, although some methodologies seem to inspire or be more helpful than others for certain people. Find what works for you: what practices might impact your day in a way that you stay in better connection with Divinity? What might influence your motivations and actions to stay in better support of others, nature, and the goodness in the world and yourself?

Google, peruse our site, or check out our forums for ideas! One thing I'm leaning into is trying to make our forums a more lively place in our collective body ;) Maybe try dancing or humming to the impactful song below? No matter what you do, we love the good in you!

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[1] As you may know, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.



*The One God(dess) with Many Faces*

July 29, 2018

## READINGS

### From the Bible

#### **Matthew 17:1-8**

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.<sup>3</sup> Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Offspring, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

### From Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings

Find Swedenborg's writings as free pdf downloads at [swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore](http://swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore)

#### **Excerpts from Heaven and Hell 55-56**

Since everyone accepts the heaven that is outside according to the quality of the heaven that is within, angels accept the Lord in the same way, because it is the Lord's divine nature that constitutes heaven. Consequently, when the Lord renders himself present in any particular community, his appearance depends on the nature of the good activity that community is engaged in. It is therefore not exactly the same in one community as in another. It is not that this difference is in the Lord: it is in the individuals who are seeing him from their own goodness and therefore in keeping with it. They are affected by the sight of him according to the quality of their own love. The ones who love him deeply are deeply moved, while the ones who love him less deeply are less deeply moved. Evil people, who are outside of heaven, find his presence intensely painful.

Further still, heaven is where the Lord is recognized, trusted, and loved. The different ways he is worshiped - in variations that stem from the difference of activity from one community to another - do not cause harm but bring benefit, because they are a source of heaven's perfection.





We can see that this underlies all perfection from every instance of beauty, charm, and delight that moves both our senses and our spirits. Such instances arise and flow invariably from a harmonious agreement of many things that are in sympathetic concord, whether they are together simultaneously or follow in a sequence. They do not flow from a single unit that lacks plurality. So we say that variety delights, and recognize that the delight depends on the quality of the variety. We can see from this, as though in a mirror, how perfection stems from variety in heaven as well, since things that happen in the natural world offer us a reflection of things in the spiritual world.

### **Excerpts from Apocalypse Revealed 939 (feel free to skim!)**

That by "seeing the face of the Lord" is not meant to see His face, but to know and acknowledge Him as He is as to His Divine attributes, which are many; and that they who are conjoined with Him by love know Him, and thus see His face, may be evident from the following passages:

What to Me is the multitude of sacrifices, when ye come to see the face of Jehovah, ([Isaiah 1:11-12](#)).

My soul thirsteth for the living God, when shall I come to see the face of God? I will yet confess Him, His face is salvation, ([Psalms 42:2, 5](#)).

Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, ([Psalms 31:16](#)).

Who will show us any good? Lift up upon us the light of Thy face, O Jehovah, ([Psalms 4:6](#)).

They shall walk in the light of Thy face, O Jehovah, ([Psalms 89:15](#)).

God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, ([Psalms 67:1](#)).

Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face, ([Psalms 31:21](#)).

Thou hast set our hidden things in the light of Thy face, ([Psalms 90:8](#)).

The bread upon the table in the tabernacle was called the bread of faces, ([Exodus 25:30](#); [Numbers 4:7](#)).

[3] In the opposite sense by the face of Jehovah is signified anger and aversion, for the reason that the evil person turns theirself away from the Lord; and when they turn theirself away, it appears to them as if the Lord turned Himself away and was angry; as is evident from these passages:

I have set My face against this city for evil, ([Jeremiah 21:10](#); [44:11](#)).

I will set My face against them, and fire shall devour them, when I shall set My face against them, ([Ezekiel 15:7](#)).

The face of Jehovah is against them that do evil, ([Psalms 34:16](#)).

I saw Him that sat upon the throne, from whose face the heaven and the earth fled away, ([Revelation 20:11](#)).

That no one can see the Lord, as He is in Himself, as was said above, is manifest from this:

Jehovah said to Moses, Thou canst not see My face, for no man shall see Me, and live, ([Exodus 33:18-23](#)).

Yet that He has been seen, and they have lived, because it was through an angel, is manifest (from [Genesis 32:30](#); [Judges 13:22-23](#); and elsewhere).

## The one god(dess) with many faces

There's a TV show that I watched this last year called American Gods, maybe you've heard of it. It's a fascinating show based on a novel of the same name by Neil Gaiman depicting the many divine entities connected to the earth and her people. Each has their own personality, relationships, motives, destructive habits, and so on - much like Greek Gods, indeed, many of them are! In the very last episode of the first season they depict a party where many Jesus's show up, one for every major idea of Jesus Christ: there's a black Jesus, Japanese, etc, although strangely I didn't see a female or a shining one, and the most powerful (due to his amazing number of worshippers) is the white Jesus.



I think this is where the show struck a chord for me, where it reveals a little more readily the fundamental concept it's playing with: Divine characters only exist due to our beliefs, not the other way around. In a way, I think that's right - our individual conception of Divinity often creates a seemingly separate God from the God of the person next to us, particularly and especially when we say it's a different Divine Personhood, and when we condemn others to hell for not getting the spelling, their personal label, or the organization right.

So how many Gods are there? How many beings can be omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and all the other "o" attributes people like to believe Goddess has (me included)? Well, you tell me. From my perspective, it seems that if an entity knows everything and is everywhere, saying there's two or three of them doesn't make much

sense. However, God approaches each of us in our lives in different ways. For example, you may not believe in all the "o's." The Divine One touches every culture and subculture with a light, but strong, touch - like gravity, descending in a myriad of ways suitable to the people receptive to her and her qualities. What are her qualities? Well, I believe they are the essence of what makes our myriad styles of worship important (worship being our living), they are the qualities of goodness (not evil), truth (not falsity), love (not hate), and wisdom (not selfishness nor egotism).

Unfortunately, we often take the subtlety and the infinite expressions of Divinity and twist them into static idols once we receive a certain incarnation of him - one we use to bludgeon our neighbors with. Often, I believe its not even a true conviction and faith that we use to hurt others with, but a type of mask we wear for bludgeoning, tradition and power's sake. This misuse of Goddess occurs with Christians (as most Swedenborgians are), Atheists, Buddhists, Scientists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and on, doesn't it? Even when we don't call God "God." Moreover, our finite eyes must see God through our personal blinders while we hopefully seek to see and accept more of that Divinity, but forcing others to see the Lord through those blinders "or else" is a habit of self-worship, of making our personal perspective the standard for and stamp of the Divine.

Our scripture today from Matthew describes a story that many call "the Transfiguration," where "God With Us" shows their true self. Unlike the seemingly male form that Jesus presented in his everyday life on earth (and also unlike the mostly invisible or omnipresent presence Christ presents now) in this story Christ the "Anointed One" shines like the sun - a sun which gives life, light, and heat to all. After this, Peter wants to create a separate tent for each teacher and prophet: Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, at which point a cloud descends and God speaks. Once the disciples hear the voice of Jehovah and humble themselves, they look up and see only One Rabbi above them.

For me, this is a very telling story and parable. In Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical visions, a cloud often descends when spirits are conversing about something spiritual and go off track in the world of spirits (a type of middle place between Heaven and Hell). This usually culminates with an angel descending (angels being deceased people or aliens in Heaven, according to Swedenborg) to clarify the matter.

I wonder what needed clarifying in our story for that cloud to descend? Often we want to separate our teachers, our teachings, and our prophets from each other, saying that they each get their own tent, that they each are very separate entities, when yet there is only one teacher, there is only one true Humanity that leads us all in truth and love: the Divine One. Whether you call this Goddess Vishnu or Sophia, Divinity is infinitely Divine and whole, and so we shouldn't be dismissive or judgmental just because something strikes us as different, untraditional or wrong in someone else's view of him - there is but one tent, full of diversity and plurality.

In Emanuel Swedenborg's mystical writings he talks about how the word "face" in scripture represents someone's internal qualities, and to see the Lord's face is to "recognize and acknowledge what He is like as to His Divine attributes," as he says

above. We can see that the use of "face" in Biblical scripture has some of this meaning by perusing the many verses Swedenborg quotes (only some of which I quoted, promise). These verses have a qualitative bent to them, indicating that to see the Lord's face or to have it lifted toward us has a lot to do with our actions and our spirits: that the Lady's face "shines" and gives off light for those who accept goodness in their life and in their motivations. If this light isn't clearly a spiritual metaphor I don't know what is!

In fact, we not only read supplications for God's face to shine on us, but also descriptions of how the Divine's face is turned away from those who are evil. As Swedenborg puts it, what this really means is that the person turns away from God, turns away from goodness, and are using the life that they receive from the Divine for "evil:" destruction, materialism, and selfishness.

Of course, what we believe is truly good or evil is subject to reflection, interrogation and discernment. Biblical scripture clearly makes the point though that our actions and motivations really matter, and it often indicates either literally or metaphorically the types of things that are evil or good. Further, Jesus says, "Why say Lord, Lord and not do what I have told you to do?" All too often we place goodness in one label, instead of what's in our hearts, motivations, and actions - the things scripture keeps pleading for us to do good with.

However we start to discern what goodness is, what's heavenly, what allows us to have the light of Divinity's face and name shine upon us, let it be in dialogue with that light, with that Divinity, and its impact on the people and the world around us. Like God's face, goodness is multifaceted and infinite, trying to uplift where it can, giving us our goodness in all our guises. Like a sun, goodness shines on each person differently, too bright to be seen entirely, seeking to provide the energy and heat of all life and love.

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

*The Godliness of Ecology*

*August 5, 2018*

## READINGS

Rumi

Behind the beauty of the moon is the Moon Maker. There is Intelligence inside the ocean's intelligence, feeding our love like an invisible waterwheel.

### From Biblical Scripture

#### **Deuteronomy 10:14**

Heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it.

#### **Isaiah 11:6-9, 24:3-6**

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.

#### **Numbers 35:33**

You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.

### From Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings

Find Swedenborg's writings as free pdf downloads at [swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore](http://swedenborgiancommunity.org/explore)



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## Divine Love & Wisdom #340.3

There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. Unless people realize that there is a spiritual world and that it is as distinct from the physical world as an antecedent circumstance is from its consequence or a cause from what it causes, they cannot know anything about this inflow. This is why people who have written about the origin of plants and animals have found it necessary to trace them back to nature. If they do trace them back to God, they say that God gifted nature with the ability to bring forth plants and animals in the beginning. They do not realize that nature is not "gifted" with any power. In its own right, it is dead and contributes no more to bringing things forth than a tool contributes to the work of an artisan--if it is to accomplish anything, it needs constantly to be activated. It is spiritual reality, reality that finds its origin in the sun where the Lord is and that goes to the limits of nature, that produces the forms of plants and animals and causes the miracles that we see in both, filling them in with earthly substances so that the forms are stable and enduring.

It is acknowledged, then, that there is a spiritual world, that what is spiritual comes from a sun where the Lord is who is its source, and that this spiritual reality stirs nature into action the way something living stirs something lifeless. It is acknowledged further that there are things in that spiritual world that resemble things in our physical world. We can therefore see that plants and animals have come into being solely from the Lord through that world and that they constantly keep coming into being through it. This means that there is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical one.

## The GODdESSNESS / Godliness of Ecology

[Let us take a few breaths before beginning - I need to stretch my legs before I get up on my high horse ;) Head [here](#) if you'd like to share your own 2 cents with us!]

As many of us acknowledge today, our world is at or possibly well-passed a crossroads in terms of ecological and environmental health. Even for those of us who discount human impact on global warming in spite of much peer-reviewed scientific evidence ("there's no human-made global warming, if there's any warming it's just natural;" "yeah, but what percentage is human-caused - I'm still waiting on more details"), we should be aware of the extinctions and death that we've caused around us. Ignoring our impact as a society for convenience, defensive, and ideological sake is paramount to collectively embodying narcissism: unwilling to hear the complaints of our impact on the world around us because "it's all their fault anyway."





[Let us not embody narcissism in our living and intending, personally and collectively. Let us be willing to accept discernment, acknowledging that our salvation is a multilevel process dependent on the advent of light or awareness.]

These mass deaths extend from coral reefs and the abundant life they support to all the world's vertebrates (besides humans, dogs, and cats - which unbelievably [make up 97% of the world's entire biomass](#), nowadays). This includes all apex predators, marine and on-land, all fish, birds, most four-legged animals (not rats!), and further: butterflies, moths, and generally, all wildlife. This is why it's so easy for a species to head toward extinction when we further extend the violence toward them for illegal gain (see elephants and tigers). The population of most earthly species has dropped considerably since the time of Jesus' advent - perhaps this is what he meant when she said she came to bring a sword? For some reason, I don't think so exactly.

[Thankfully, the Lord's sword is said to come from his mouth and pierce the heart of our dominating internal dragons, let it do so with our ecological ones, spiritual and natural.]

Human beings have made tremendous technological and industrial progress at the expense of the Earth and each other. Largely this is because the external costs of these achievements are often overlooked and ignored since they don't automatically appear on our corporate financial statements (currently, some of the most important documents in the world) - except when we're fined or forced to step up. Indeed, the vicious cycle of our shareholder-profit-driven-version of capitalism means that ignoring these impacts are for the benefit of a corporation's, and often our personal, financial "health." Intentionally bringing undo awareness to these negative externalities can often amount to corporate or career suicide - a righteous death indeed.

[Let us die to our greed, collecting spiritual capital rather than material. Let us die to our selfishness, being willing to interrogate our motives and living to lean into our collective Godliness.]

As individuals, we often feel like there is nothing we can do to overcome these trends on our own, caught up in the pressures of scarcity that our touted system creates around us. Our collective apathy even in the face of surmounting evidence is typically referenced as the source of the impending environmental calamities, but in a system of structural and commercial evil, where do we start with our own ecological work?

[Let us feel empowered as ourselves in the hands of Goddess, let us know that the source of change within and around us is infinite.]

Well, within and without. I believe that ecology is deeply connected with the state of our hearts and our acceptance of Divinity within and that internal change must have a deep impact on our living and acting to the benefit of our world, otherwise that spiritual growth is just a feeling or a belief in our own stature. On the other hand, just leaning into our acting without a push toward transforming our collective heart doesn't get us very far as a people. When we lean toward just social justice, and not justice and the merciful

transformation of spirit, we tend to alienate those who disagree with us (sorry if I've alienated you, by the way - please share your opinion with us too!). Instead of helping each other find the ground needed for internal ecology, which will lead directly to external transformation if its real and we're intentional about it, we often tout external statistics or "reason" only, demanding that our neighbors change due to the surmounting physical evidence. If there's any hope for us as a species on this planet, both strategies are necessary.

Further, for me, uplifting the need for both is paramount in this ministry as we try to acknowledge the environment both within and around people. It's hard to not be oppressive and destructive when we are spiritually oppressed by domination motives within, and when our definition of salvation amounts to only a caricature of an internal salve while we condemn others to hell.

[Let us be pluralistic in all our uplifting, in others as well as in the natural world around us. Help us to discern the how and feel more of the why.]

Moreover, what is ecology and what is Godliness? Well, since they're synonyms the answer should be easy... haha. Often the word "ecology" is used to imply the movement to protect and uplift the natural world on earth. The root of the word is the Greek word for house, and the "-logy" part just denotes the study, interest, and enactment of it. Interestingly, Jehovah of Hebrew scripture fame calls the natural world and our hearts his house, her dwelling place, the working of their (singular) hands. Divinity dwells within the health of the natural world as she dwells within us, there is a spirit to all things. As Emanuel Swedenborg liked to point out, the natural world, gardens and the like, are in forms representative of God's intelligence: nature is in evolved and evolving forms that help us to discern the Lord's Wisdom, and both realms are necessary.

Lest we lose sight of it: Divinity's incarnation, her Word, her substance and form, is at the heart of all creation, and is what gives rise to and enlivens nature, both spiritual and corporeal. And often, oppressing the corporeal incarnation of something goes a long way toward oppressing its spirit as well: slavery, oppression, and death are no spiritual walks in the park. As Jesus tells us, whatever we do to the least of these we do to him - this is not a metaphor just for her empathy, but the reality of the Divine being who is all of our endurance, vulnerability, and strength, whatever we call him and whether or not we acknowledge her directly. Albeit, I find acknowledging that the source of my life and goodness is the Divine (and not myself) seems to help me in tremendous ways.

[Let us remember what has come before and give thanks for our ancestors and native peoples. Help us to acknowledge that we are not the end nor the beginning of strength and wisdom, but receive her through our environment, families, DNA, neighbors, and ultimately, through herself.]

Often Genesis 1:26 is cited as an explanation as to why human beings can trample through creation without care for their environment, except for how it serves them. In many English translations it says something like: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in

our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'

Unfortunately for the Earth, the word "dominion" would have been more accurately translated as "responsibility for," but as we've seen in recent human history - nuances of translation most often work for our dominating impulses, instead of us allowing those scriptural nuances to undermine those impulses, as they are designed to do. As we saw in our other Bible verses today (and there are many more on the same theme!) there is quite a bit in scripture that describes how Divinity is intertwined and present in the natural world, much like how the Lord's is also present with us.

[Let us make sound personal, organizational and political decisions to help uplift the Goddessness in the world around us, instead of crucifying her.]

This ultimately means that uplifting the natural world and the people around us toward health (ecology) is synonymous with the internal transformation of our hearts towards Divinity (the salvation of accepting more Goddessness) - we can't lean into one without leaning into the other. The book of Isaiah says, "The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" - indicating the deep connection between our spiritual health and the state of our environment. Let us not be lulled into apathy because the breeze of our oppression and the grass of our yard seem fine today - for many, these fine things spell suffering, pain, and death - let us instead work toward the Godliness of Ecology, within, without, for all created and creating things.

[Let us move through the world knowing that what we encounter is ourselves and Divinity speaking, living, and intending to uplift. Enter a natural environment this week with the intention of communing with the Divine and cultivating your Godly connection with the Earth.]

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

*Remember to Sabbath by Rev. Jane Siebert*

*August 12, 2018*

## READINGS

From Biblical Scripture

### Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff — they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

## REMEMBER TO SABBATH

By Rev. Jane Siebert

When you ask someone how they are, we often hear, "I'm so busy." And when I am asked, "how are you doing?" My first inclination is to answer, "Good, and busy". It is like a medal of honor to be "busy". We are pushed by a culture that equates busyness with purpose and success. And as Swedenborgians we put "being of use" right at the top of our to do list.



The name of my message for today is not a mistake, "Remember to Sabbath." The word Sabbath is normally thought of as a noun, referring to a certain day of the week. The seventh day was when God rested from creating all of creation. For Jews this is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. For Christians Sabbath is Sunday, the first day of the week, when Jesus Christ rose from the grave.

Sabbath actually comes from the Hebrew verb *Shabat*, which means to rest. The root of the word Sabbath comes from the root word *Shub* which means to return to a mental or spiritual state, away from business and towards the Lord. It also relates to restoration. All of these connections help to expand what we often think of when we list the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy."

Remember to sabbath, to rest. Not necessarily keeping a certain day holy, but to recognize the holiness of rest and restoration. It is not about the old legalistic ritual to keep Sunday holy. In

today's world it is about finding time in our lives to be holy, to rest, to care for our bodies and souls, to remember to Sabbath.

I thought it would be good to talk about this today as we are heading into summer, when we often are busiest. The days are longer. There is so much going on in our lives. Kids are out of school. Vacations are planned. The yard and garden call us. Summer is a time of activity and often we forget to rest. At Pretty Prairie we don't even have worship services in summer to remind us to pause, relax and lift-up our hearts to remember God. We sometimes forget our holy connections and miss the joy of rest. (Pretty Prairie does have Bible study all summer).

Our scriptures relate many stories of the need for rest. When Moses becomes weary as he led the Israelites through the desert, God said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Jesus tells his disciples, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

And as Jesus invited his disciples, he invites us, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

Intrinsically we know we need rest but knowing is not necessarily doing. How many things I know I should do, but don't. This message is as much for me as each one of you. We have to make Sabbath happen, or our bodies might just make it for us.

First, stop. Sabbath can only happen if we shut off the computer, our phone, the TV, ignore the laundry and withdraw from the worldly things that entice and control us. It doesn't have to be a full day. Start with an hour, or a morning, and surrender to a time when you will not be disturbed, tempted or responsive to technology and work left undone.

When we stop, we see that the world continues without us. We need this sometimes – gentle humility. We do not have to keep pushing ourselves and others. We can get trapped with an artificial urgency that we must keep going and doing. When we stop, we let our minds rest, our bodies heal, our spirits are restored. As the Psalmist invites us, "*Be still, and know.*"

Etty Hillesum, in the diary she kept while in a Nazi concentration camp, writes:

"We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies.... The things that have to be done must be done, and for the rest we must not allow ourselves to become infested with thoughts and of petty fears and worries, so many

motions of no confidence in God. Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world." [2]

And surrender. In Exodus, we read, "In six days God made heaven and earth and on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed." The word, 'refreshed' literally means, and God exhaled. The creation occurs with the inhale and the Sabbath is the exhale. Without exhaling, the life-giving, creative force of inhaling is impossible. Ancient rabbis teach on the seventh day, God created menuha – tranquility, serenity, peace and repose – rest, in the deepest sense, healing stillness. Until the Sabbath, the birth of blessed rest, the circle of creation was not complete.

Savor little bits of Sabbath. While we often think we need a day of rest, many of us find it hard to find a full day, or even a half day. First we must experience the value of a bit of Sabbath. A book that I have talked about before is *Seven Sacred Pauses*. The goal is to find something regular in your life that reminds you to exhale and experience the Divine in the midst of your busy day. Some use the hours of the day: first thing in the morning, mid-morning, noon, mid-afternoon, dinner, evening and night time. The practice is to stop and look out the window, or pause in your cubicle and think a good thought, or just breathe in a full breath and exhale slowly three times. Anything that breaks the routine of a busy day and reminds you that God loves you and all manner of things shall be well. I put quotes above my computer. Right now I have one from Simone Weil, "In everything which gives us the pure authentic feeling of beauty there really is the presence of God." [3]

I want to share an ancient practice that you can use this summer to enter into Sabbath rest. Some of you may know it, and that is good, this will just be a reminder. It is Lectio Divina, or contemplative reading, and it is common in most religions. I find it feeds my soul.

It begins with reading a short passage of scripture or other inspirational writing and then quietly reflecting on it. It is not analyzing or concentrating on the meaning, but rather allowing it to speak to your heart. It is to be done slowly, contemplatively, letting God speak to you through the words to touch you and heal you.

I have given you one to start with, the 23rd Psalm. It is best to read it out loud, if you can, or in silence is OK, too. Read it a few times and then notice what phrase or word stands out to you. Then sit quietly or take a walk, and allow the words to be in you. When your mind wanders, come back to the phrase, without judgement or searching for meaning or answers. Just let it be with you.



## Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff — they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

[2] Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum, 1941-43*. London: Persephone Books, 1999.

[3] Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. transl. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr, Routledge: 2002, 150



*Sex Trafficking-The Plague We Ignore*

*August 19, 2018*

## READINGS

### **Caged Bird by Maya Angelou**

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still



and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

### From Biblical Scripture

#### Isaiah 61:1-6

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lady is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. She has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our Goddess, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of her splendor.

They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our Goddess. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

## Sex Trafficking - the Plague we Ignore

By Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts

Often more vicious than any animal, human beings can be abusive to family, harbor hidden, destructive addictions, and inspire the watered down monsters in our movies. Often, it is the shape of a man in the doorway that strikes the most fear in any heart.

What do you think of when you read "sex trafficking"? Perhaps the horrendous kidnapping, sexual abuse, and rape of primarily women, girls, and boys. Tough to read, tougher to reflect on its reality, infinitely more difficult to experience firsthand. Too many basements, warehouses, and hotel rooms are filled with drugged abuse victims, often mistaken for criminals when the police arrive officially. And yes, men are raped and abducted as well - much more often than we can imagine. Our lack of vigilance, our complacency, and our participation with these crimes allows them to abound throughout the world, while we emphasize the need for our drug war, war on "terror," and our war on the impoverished and marginalized.



Human trafficking is the world's fastest growing crime with a (low) estimate of 25 million today in servitude. The UN estimates that over half of these were trafficked to be

sexually exploited, which doesn't include those trafficked for other reasons who are also sexually exploited (or who easily can be). Sex trafficking happens in all Western countries, including the U.S., and is estimated to be a multibillion dollar industry in the States (at \$290 million in Atlanta, GA alone). Victims describe seeing thousands of primarily men over the course of a few days, including police officers - with no end in sight. With no time allowed for sleep and often given forced drug-cocktails these people are trapped in stupor and a literal hell-on-earth.

Sometimes addiction drives the victimized into a situation to be trafficked, and always addiction drives a victimizer into a decision to traffic. Our system does little to alleviate this cycle of addiction and monstrosity, as we put little emphasis on rehabilitation for any addiction or crime, instead turning toward a rehab-less for-profit prison system, which just perpetuates abuse and trafficking in all their forms.

This is a snapshot of human trafficking and sex trafficking. And yet, sex trafficking goes further. Sex trafficking is a destructive impulse ingrained in much of our societies and every day breathing, an impulse that allows the monstrously heinous forms just described. It has been a prominent aspect of marriage, family life, political life, religion, and personal life for thousands of years in this world, which includes our internal and cyber-living today. Recently we've seen how it can infiltrate organizations like the Catholic Church and Fox News, with top managers, ministers, and leaders actively victimizing and sheltering victimizers for years while often still shunning responsibility when the headlights hit. But this impulse is wider, it's often within and around us.

A glance from your neighbor, a glance from you, the reactions you harbor. A glance at your daughter, a need to feel control. The judgments and language we sometimes speak when we think someone shows too much skin, "gets around," or upsets us: sl\*\*, sk\*\*, fu\*\*boy, wh\*\*\*; the language we often speak when we're attracted to someone: sexy, hot, fine; and our aversion of people who don't meet the bodily standards of today or our worldview. The epitome and climax of relationship on TV: frequently the closest to a moment of meditation and reflection before the drama continues or the happily ever after roles. The moments when we sometimes feel the most personal shame, the most bodily shame, the most spiritual shame, the most personal power, the most personal dominance, the most personal sense of worth.

This is our trafficking in sex, in our sex, in their sex, in their view of what's sexy, in sexuality, in the perceived value of sex and sexual prowess, all within our yearnings to feel self-worth, to feel love, and to assert our domination and selfish fulfillment. Although sexuality is not inherently hellish (read: destructive and selfish), we often create a hell out of something that should uplift and help fulfill our humanity, as well as serve the heaven seeking to be further actualized within and without.

Beyond the economic, sex trafficking was often the basis for slavery in America, much more so than our history books will mention. And when the enslaved weren't fulfilling the sexual deviancy of their kidnappers and abusers, they had to work excruciating labor - all of which would outpace Christ's reported physical passion by a margin. Albeit -

Divinity, Christ, Goddess, is present in all of our passions. The essence of the Universe is the heart of our passion, endurance, and awareness itself: she overcomes with us and through us. Let her servant heart, deep compassion, and understanding overcome in you with justice and mercy.

Thus, in all human trafficking there is an element and potential of sex trafficking, indeed the majority of literal trafficking victims are trafficked for sex, for our domination and their exploitation. We traffic in male and female bodies for what they do best for us in their biological sex, depending on our desires and wants in the moment: no matter their identity, no matter their history, no matter their cosmic worth and right to be free.

And in our sex trafficking we are trafficked. We are enslaved by our destructive habits and intentions, by our subservience to the spirit of domination and control, of materialism and material gratification. In Emanuel Swedenborg's view, we are quite literally enslaved by evil spirits (dead people/aliens who still continue to love domination) while in these selfish motivations and habits. These things are not us, but we receive them, we accept them, we embody them and force them onto other bodies.

Even in our non-addiction to pornography and sexual imagery we are trafficked and we traffic. Often, these elements are defended in the name of rejecting our still existing sexual snobbery and need for control - but an addiction is an addiction, even if we don't allow the habit to be questioned. Further, we must reflect on our habits to discern which spiritually and internally uplift us and others, and which do not - you may be surprised at what you do that seems to deaden your spirit.

Further and still not furthest, our economy is a pyramid scheme - an upside-down triangle where money rains down to the individuals with the highest 0.1% of capital in their pockets. Our idea of trickle-down economics is really just the splash back of the downpour of our production hitting these individuals, most of which land on the rest of those friends of theirs making up the top 1% of capital holders. This disparity economy starts with the bylaws and requirements of publicly traded companies (they must maximize profit after paying their workers or face consequences, meaning they maximize the return of cash investors, not labor or life investors) and it forces many people into tough situations, into multiple jobs and pain. We are not only in the mindset of scarcity but literally in an economy with much-forced scarcity. You don't die in a desert from an imagined lack of water and we live in a desert with too many similarities to the one in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.

We are continuously forced to fend for ourselves in ways no isolated aboriginal or first people's village would imagine. When technology allowed a village to no longer undertake a tough, menial task, this often meant a boon for those workers and the village. Today, it often means "they took our jobs" - meaning immigrants - and a desperate fend for new work. The many thousands of "owners" (shareholders) collect the surplus from the discovery and insist on cutting the excess, unnecessary baggage (workers). In return, the workers become ever-more desperate to find menial pay, often

turning toward work that no one wants to do, but work that requires a physical body and is harder to outsource (including prostitution).

Providing cash, in practice, is much more important than providing your life and time today - unless you're a manager: by definition a job where you are placed in control of workers doing the groundwork of an organization. Thus, we have sex workers who don't work to express their sense of sexual power, freedom, or to fulfill a need, but out of the desperation our system forces on them. Thus, most workers work out of a similar awareness of scarcity and pressure, but perhaps often without such limited options.

This is my view of our system - one plagued by sex trafficking that we largely ignore (please share your view of this in our forums or otherwise). A system that traffics in sex and disparity constantly - from the most obviously heinous forms to the least obvious internal forms that proliferate our suffering, while we turn a blind eye except toward the obvious headlines of abduction, which tend to focus on only "the girl next door." May we break free from victim blaming, may we wake up from our sex trafficking mindset and apathy, from continuing the line of victimizing, from our need to dominate, and break toward the being of light in the doorway pointing toward the abundance and rehabilitation harbored around us. May we no longer ignore the plague in front of our faces.

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.





*Heaven on Wheels*

*August 26, 2018*

## READINGS

From Biblical Scripture

### **Ezekiel 1:3-21**

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was on him.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. They each had two wings spreading out upward, each wing touching that of the creature on either side; and each had two other wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like topaz, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not change direction as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

# Heaven on Wheels

By Rev. Dr. James Lawrence

Keep in mind: Historians report that psychedelic hallucinogens occurring naturally in certain vegetative material were in use by the time Ezekiel saw his vision. Can you imagine sauntering in Ezekiel's sandals that day? You're perhaps feeling unsettled, disoriented, afraid, even lost after the collapse of your religious culture, and you wander along the banks of the river Kebar mulling it all over. And the hand of God comes upon your shoulder with a great voice suggests that you get ready to see something. And indeed, you behold a great cloud fast approaching out of which lightning is flashing. As it comes closer you see four living creatures supporting a great arch on top of which God is enthroned. The four living creatures each have four wings and four faces—an ox face, an eagle face, a lion face, and a human face. And alongside each four-faced creature there is a wheel, which upon closer inspection is actually wheels intersecting wheels, and the wheels are shining like chrysolite and are rimmed with seeing eyes.



Shortly before, Ezekiel and his compatriots had been forcibly exported from Palestine up to Chaldea in ancient Babylon, which is modern day Iraq. "There we sat down and wept" they wrote later. It seemed to them that all their hopes of survival as a nation had come to an end. They called themselves God's chosen people, yet they had been forced to leave God behind, or so they thought, because let us keep in mind that at that time, just like everywhere else in the world, their idea of God was a tribal God, really—a local deity: Yahweh, who hovered in the high parts above the ark of the covenant in the temple in Jerusalem. But now Jerusalem was sacked and that ark was stolen and that temple about to be destroyed. Yahweh presumably was 500 miles away—a homeless deity probably prowling Palestine at that very moment seeking another people who would be more faithful.

It's in this context that Ezekiel's vision begins to make sense. This was during the same period of history that monotheism was first grasped—with Isaiah and Jeremiah along with Ezekiel came through as important an insight for religion as the invention of the wheel, if you don't mind my saying so. And here these two great religious insights (monotheism and God's whereabouts) are interconnected, because Ezekiel sees that God is NOT tethered to the old temple. On that chariot throne, Yahweh and the heavenly helpers can haul! God has wheels, baby! And this was the vision that helped the people of Yahweh begin to grasp that God gets around and is in fact omnipresent.

This is such an important insight: that God meets us wherever we are. We can be grappling with one of our great life decisions or merely with one of myriad moments each week in which our soul is engaged to respond to life situations, and God is right there with us—is wheeling right along us with wherever we go: into the supermarket, into the conversation with the friend we come across, into the argument we have with some loved one, into all our feelings about ourselves during the course of a day in the totality of our living: God's moving right along with us.

Sid Caesar once cracked: "The guy who invented the first wheel—he was an idiot. The guy who invented the other three—he's the genius!" Yeah, four wheels was the trick. You can go anywhere on four wheels, but check this out: God's rod has wheels within wheels for hairpin, razor-sharp turning—this buggy effortlessly handles the wildest turns and craziest paths our living takes.

But wait, there's more! The Godrod wheels possess a particularly attention-grabbing feature: they're rimmed with eyes. They see where we're going before we do! Talk about the latest navigational software: this chariot doesn't just tail with flawless aplomb, but actually always arrives there before we do—even though we get there of our own accord making our decisions in freedom.

Yeah, Swedenborg says this whole vision piece of the Godrod is about divine providence: the correspondence of the eyes encircling the wheels is God's faithful foresight. We're marveling these days with how we can program smart cars to parallel-park for us. Still a far cry from knowing in advance where we're going. But God knows where we're going before we choose it, and is already there even though we choose in our freedom and not from pre-programming. Good theology is lovely with sweet paradox.

How much would you give to have such a Godrod available to you? Well hold on, because there's more! These wheels within wheels rimmed with eyes also come fully equipped with living creatures that have four wings and four faces. Okay, now we're into some very radical kind of engineering. Because there's this power system in the wheels connected with these four living creatures, and what do the design specs say there in Ezekiel 1:21? "The spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels." Whoa, talk about a technology bump! *The wheels are alive.*

If we looked ahead to chapter ten we would read that Ezekiel identifies the four living creatures as cherubim, and cherubim always have one role in scripture: they protect and guide. They are part of God's providential care system. What do we know about their rules of engagement? We know they each have four wings and four faces. The wings surely indicate aerodynamic capabilities and probably work with the wheels' differential transaxle system in such a way that this providential care system can go as high as we can ever need or as low as is sometimes needed.

But what about their four faces—eagle, lion, ox, and human: why do they have these faces?

Because that is how God can be present with us. Let's see how this works.

Almost always, when we're struggling, when we're beset by fears and anxieties or anger by despair, by spiritual definition we have lost our vision, at least for the moment. We already have or are in danger of losing our perspective. What's that saying? Perspective alters perception. Christians in ancient Rome, unlike others sent to their theatrical deaths in the Coliseum, went singing, because they had a different perspective on what was going down than did the others. There is always a divine outreach to our spiritual mind for keen discernment and for lofty thinking. When soaring high on strong pinions, our minds gather in a broader vision that can hold our experiences in a spiritual perspective, which helps us understand divine goals for living, which often do not closely resemble earthly goals. There is a divine outreach to us every moment we are alive to rise higher in our thoughts, to enter into the purer atmosphere of heaven's light, to see ourselves more truly as we are with an uncompromising spiritual integrity, and to see the nature of the life in which we find ourselves. And so these wheels have the face of an eagle.

A second cornerstone of regeneration is courage. We need moral bravery not only to face the demons from without but also those from within. It isn't always easy, this business of spiritual growth. It isn't all expensive vision quests in faraway lands or listening to the soothing sounds of Ravi Shankar. More than seldom a learning curve means some pain, means facing a change we've been resisting, means deserting a favored place, means renouncing something we've loved. As the German theologian Johann-Baptiste Metz famously wrote: "Are we Christians really changing our hearts, or do we just believe in a change of hearts?" It is sometimes about courage, beloved, so these wheels have the face of a lion.

And yet it is equally true that the great bulk of our regeneration journey with God is not filled with dramatics, but with daily faithfulness--with doing our daily rounds in quiet confidence and fidelity. Think of the Eucharist: a humble chunk of bread, a small sip of the juice of the vine—deceptive, really, because these are so good, so beautiful. Our grounding routine obligations, these daily uses that can hold so much goodness in them: this is the regimen that God has designed for our long living. Patient labor, trusting what the day can give us, staying the course: do we see how profoundly this daily faithfulness in small things builds our bones, and how much the world needs souls who patiently bear the perennial burdens of creating human community. That's why these wheels have the face of an ox.

And it is always time to reach for what the human potential movement liked to call our higher self! To boldly imagine our full personhood, that angelhood for which we were created, that me and you created in the very image and likeness of God. To believe in the vision that God has for

us, something more than we have yet attained, that higher capacity of wisdom and love modeled for us by God personally as the Divine Human: a vision of us extraordinary in letting higher love and wisdom shine through our special and unique personhood. And that's why these wheels have the face of a human.

It is through our vision of spiritual truth, through our courage, through our steady work, and through our desire to become fully human that we open ourselves to God's presence, which is always with us.

I like to call it heaven on wheels: where we develop our character, our values, our humanity. Heaven always here, moving around wherever we go, and open to us in our sincerity and integrity of effort. Now two and a half millennia later it's uncanny how Ezekiel's dazzling vision of heaven on wheels anticipates how madly future humans would fall in love with wheels. So be it: let's all hop in and go for a joy ride!

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

*Is Hell Real?*

*September 2, 2018*

## READINGS

From Biblical Scripture

### Revelation 21:8

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

### Matthew 10:28

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

### Heaven and Hell

**505.** When spirits are in this state of their deeper concerns, then it is obvious what kind of people they really were in the world. They actually behave in accord with their own nature. People who were inwardly devoted to the good in the world then behave sanely and wisely, more wisely than when they were living in the world, in fact, because they have been freed from any connection with the body and therefore with the earthly things that darken and cover with a kind of cloud.

In contrast, people who were focused on evil in the world then behave foolishly and insanely, more insanely than when they were in the world, in fact, because they are in freedom and are no longer constrained. As long as they were living in the world, they were outwardly sensible, because this was how they imitated rational people. So when the outer layers are stripped off, their inner insanity is unveiled.

### **521.** No One Enters Heaven on the Basis of Mercy Alone

If people have not been taught about heaven, the way to heaven, and the life of heaven for those on earth, they think that acceptance into heaven comes from a pure mercy extended to people of faith, people for whom the Lord intercedes, so that admission depends solely on grace. They therefore think that anyone at all can be saved out of good will; and some people even think that this includes the inhabitants of hell.

However, they do not know anything about human beings, that our quality depends on our lives and our lives on our loves. This applies not only to the deeper levels of our volition and intellect but even to the outer aspects of our bodies, with the physical form



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being nothing but an outward form in which our deeper natures manifest themselves in practice. This means that our love is our whole person (see above, 363).

**524.** If we could be saved by nothing but mercy then everyone would be saved, even the people in hell. In fact, there would not be any hell because the Lord is mercy itself, love itself, goodness itself. So it goes against his essential divine nature to say that all people can be saved directly and that he does not save them. We know from the Word that the Lord intends the salvation of all and the damnation of no one.

## What is Hell? Is Hell Real?

By Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts

Often the idea of Hell sounds and feels ridiculous - how could God torture people for not believing a certain truth, or torture people at all for any reason? Couldn't Goddess save us all if she/he were real? Religious condemnation and the risk of an unending, mind-blowing Hell have often been used as a bludgeoning tool for putting and keeping people "in-line" with certain cultural, moralistic, and dogmatic precepts. Talk about Hell.



Although Emanuel Swedenborg believed in a Heaven much more pluralistic and interfaith than most religious conceptions, he was also a firm believer and "seer" of Hell. However, his conception and visions of Hell were also quite different, and in a sense, more digestible than most too.

Despite his belief that Hell exists and lasts seemingly forever for most, his Hell does not fit into our typical preconceived notions of it: the people there feel like they love their "Hells," as people in this world often love their selfish, hurtful, and destructive desires. He even concedes that anyone could leave Hell and enter Heaven, if only they would want to! Thus, often after an initial process of discernment and exploration in the "World of Spirits" - a realm "between" Heaven and Hell - people either fully acknowledge and embody their hellish heart or their heavenly one, and join in creating the space and spiritual environment that they choose. Like in this world, we actively create and cultivate our internal and external spaces to be more Heavenly or Hellish.

Even the separation of Heaven and Hell in Swedenborg's conception has to do with distance in the spiritual realm corresponding to our differences in intent and love, not a distance created by the Higher Power casting some of us away out of vengeance and spite. Indeed, the Lady always forgives with His infinite mercy, but we can decide to continue creating the destructive space internally and externally that we've come to love and identify with. This is the phenomena of spiritual freedom present in this physical world and in the spiritual realm, a realm that underlies and gives rise to this physical one in every moment.

Thus, although Swedenborg couldn't be considered a Universalist in the strictest sense, even his Hell was a place where a person's ruling loves were allowed to reign in their internal freedom and find some outward expression, and not a place of needless torture to satisfy an angry and vengeful God.

Indeed, if there is torture in Swedenborg's Hell it is the torture of being set on evil orientations (although you think you really enjoy them), which turns you away from facing Divinity and allowing God's love to flow through you. This reception of Divinity carries intrinsically with it a blessedness and joy. There's also the pseudo-tortures of being among people set upon similar evils (the Hells are separated into societies based on individuals' similar orientations, much like Swedenborg's Heaven is) and not being allowed to run rampant with those motivations. These are only torturous in relation to what Angels (humans and aliens in Heaven) feel, but if you take an evil spirit to Heaven without changing their heart they will swear you've taken them to Hell! This is due to their opposition to that type of spiritual "environment" and its corresponding internal orientation.

Further, Swedenborg believed that Hellish spirits are still governed by forms of spiritual government, as well as the risk of upsetting each other and making themselves vulnerable by acting out. So Hell isn't a place where unthinking torture is condoned by the Lord or a place where anything goes and our sadistic impulses can find free expression on each other. As Swedenborg put it, "The Lord Governs the Hells." Is that why the Dark Lord, Satan, is always depicted as being so cool? ;)

Moreover, how do we really know there's a Hell? Well, we don't in any scientific proof-sense. Then again, I can't prove that a beautiful spring morning is peaceful to my spirit, but I can correlate certain neurological scans to reported human experiments. In other words, we take each other's word for a lot of things and correlate them, the things we can't deduce by a scientific method alone, which is especially true with experiences and feelings! Interestingly, experiences and feelings are typically considered the most important things in each of our lives.

Some things I think most of us can agree exist: bad days, horrible circumstances, destructive motivations, and excruciating environments. Most of us can agree that we can make it entirely too hard on each other through abuse, hard and controlling expectations, and destructive actions and words. Since Swedenborg's Hell has more to do with how we behave, feel, and hurt each other than religious dogma and getting God's "name" right, in a way we probably already agree on the fundamental details of his Hell: we make a hell for each other and within ourselves when our motivations are destructive and selfish. In a way, I think Swedenborg's underlying conception of and reaction to Hell is something most of us can get on board with, at least in terms of wanting to reduce these types of internal and external hells in the world. The insight comes when we realize that our selfish, egotistical, and material orientations aren't enjoyable to the extent that they reign in us: that true joy and heavenliness is felt when we allow the Lady to redeem our shallowest selves into loving service of our higher expressions within and around ourselves.

That is to say, I believe that Swedenborg's Hell is more about psychology and being emotionally healthy than it is about getting you to toe the company line or even believe "Hell is Real." We reduce our connection with and proliferation of Hell the more we reflect on our motivations and try to uplift health in ourselves, others, and in the natural world. Our religions' names matter infinitely less to us and others than the quality of our internal orientation and external actions unless we become selfish and dogmatic about those names. In our somewhat shared idea of what it means to put someone in a "hellish" circumstance, we can agree that we can improve our own circumstances and those of others by working to uplift openness, affirmation, and love, while removing said hellishness. We work to spread the kin-dom of Heaven when we help to transform all of our environments, circumstances, and internal states for the better, no matter our literal differences of opinion.

Christ preached so much about uplifting the poor, imprisoned, immigrants, and the downtrodden not to rope them into dogma, but because uplifting their health and circumstances truly is spreading the "name" (quality) of Jesus. Swedenborg believed that God's heart gave rise to wisdom and truth - the forms of love - not the other way around. Truth serves, and the more heartless and closed it finds itself, the more distorted, false, and dim it becomes - much like light trapped in a cave.

All that being said, it's amazing how few details about Hell there are in Biblical, Hebrew, and Quranic scripture. Further, there are relatively very few accounts of Hell in most any religious and theological conception outside of Swedenborgianism. And the details that we get from scripture aren't exactly uplifting, rightfully so perhaps. We read in Luke 13:28, "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out." From Revelation 21:8; "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." From Matthew 25:46; "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." From Matthew 10:28; "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and on.

In Swedenborg's visions, these troubling descriptions actually become more understandable in a way. Being "thrown out" and "cut off" for him in part represents the "natural" separation of Heaven and Hell, where distance relates to differences in internal state. This "distance" also relates to the spiritual physics that allow for life and Heaven, and also the conditions that provide the safety and health of those who are Heavenly. The descriptions of gnashing of teeth and being put into fire somewhat correspond to the relative lack of joy compared to those in Heaven and the uncomfortable passions and the actual results of selfish and destructive desires (he says a lot more about these things, I recommend you check out his writings [here](#)). All in all for Swedenborg, literal scripture often uses metaphor and the appearance of things to describe spiritual realities and should be taken much like the parables that Christ reportedly always spoke in.



Moreover and as an aside, no matter your opinion of Emanuel Swedenborg or his theological writings, literarily he should be given credit for having written the first Western Book of The Dead, called *Heaven and Hell*! Dante's story was meant as a fictional work, and even then, literary expert and Swedenborg-skeptic Olof Lagercrantz makes the point that Emanuel's Hell is quite captivating and remarkably creative and cohesive. You can read more of his literary exploration of Swedenborg and his afterlife in *Epic of the Afterlife: A Literary Approach to Swedenborg*, which is quite fascinating.

And despite the lack of theological exposition on Hell beyond Swedenborg, there is another source of pretty profound, captivating mystical visions of it: near-death experiences (NDE's). It's actually astonishing and quite interesting how Swedenborg's visions and accounts of Heaven and Hell seem to fit so well with NDE's! You can check out Swedenborg's book, *Heaven and Hell* [here](#), and NDE's [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), and decide for yourself.

That's what it's all about: your freedom and health. Lean into that health by allowing Divinity in all her guises and names transform your heart and your actions, self-reflect and be willing to recognize when something inside is a little too hellish to keep ignoring.

Thanks for being here and reading, we'd love it if you'll share your opinion on these things too in our chats and forums, in comments and emails, or during a [service](#) (on Sundays and Thursday at 9 pm ET)! See our [Worship page](#) or below for some of our latest videos :)

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[1] As you may remember, Swedenborg clearly describes a gender-inclusive and multifaith Divinity despite his lack of gender-inclusive language in much of his writings.

*Our Choice? By Rev. Dr. George Dole*

*September 9, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical Scripture**

### **Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Revised Standard Version**

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

### **Revelation 20:7-15, Revised Standard Version**

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up



the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

### **Divine Providence § 191**

"The idea that our own prudence is nothing runs directly counter to the way things seem, and therefore directly counter to most people's belief. Since this is the case, if people believe on the basis of appearances that human prudence accounts for everything, the only way to convince them is with reasoning based on deeper investigation, reasoning that must be drawn from the realm of causes. The outward appearance is an effect, and causes show where this effect comes from. In this prologue, I need to say something about common belief on the subject. What the church teaches is contrary to the appearance; namely, it teaches that love and faith do not come from us but from God, as do wisdom and intelligence, prudence, and in general everything that is good and true. When these principles are accepted, we must also accept the fact that our own prudence is nothing but only seems to be something. The only basis of prudence is intelligence and wisdom, and these two qualities come only from our discernment and consequent thought about what is true and good. What I have just said is accepted and believed by people who acknowledge divine providence and not by people who acknowledge only human prudence. One thing or the other must be true—either what the church teaches, that all wisdom and prudence come from God, or what the world teaches, that all wisdom and prudence come from us. Is there any other way to resolve the contradiction than to accept the church's teaching as true and to see what the world teaches as the appearance? The church finds support for its belief in the Word, while the world finds support for its belief in our self-importance. The Word comes from God, and self-importance comes from us. Because prudence is from God and not from us, when Christians are at worship they pray that God may guide their thoughts, plans, and deeds, adding that this is because they cannot do so on their own. Then too, when they see people doing good, they say that God has led them to do this, and so on. Could we say this if we did not believe it at some deeper level? That deeper level of belief comes from heaven. But when we think privately and gather arguments in favor of human prudence, we can believe the opposite, which comes from this world. However, the inner belief wins out for people who at heart acknowledge God, while the outer belief wins for people who do not acknowledge God at heart, no matter what they may say."





# our choice

by Rev. Dr. George Dole

In the Christian church, a common issue is the perceived tension between law and grace. Advocates of the law say that we are saved by obeying the commandments. Advocates of grace say that we are saved by the mercy of the Lord. Advocates of the law say that theories of grace lead to human irresponsibility, and advocates of grace say that theories of the law lead to self-righteousness. Both parties can quote Scripture in abundance because Scripture says both things. Paul in the letter to the Romans says "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of god, they are now justified by his grace as a gift . . . For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Romans 2:23-4, 28), while it says in the Epistle of James, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).



This is not an exclusively religious or theological concern. About the time I was in college, a rather unorthodox scholar named Pitrim A. Sorokin set himself the task of investigating the possibility of altruism. It is possible for anyone to do anything that is truly unselfish? Obviously, we can do things for other people at real cost to ourselves, but to what extent are we doing it to appease our own consciences, so that we can feel good about ourselves? Sorokin's work never gained much currency, and I was then and am now familiar with it only from a few third-hand descriptions of it. My recollection is that he did conclude that altruism was possible, but I have no knowledge of the basis of that conclusion.

There can be no doubt whatever about the insistence of our own theology we ourselves must make the choice between heaven and hell. "Everyone is predestined to heaven," (Divine Providence 329) in the very real sense that we are all designed and created for heaven; but not everyone fulfills that destiny. This means that we are capable of becoming unselfish, because "being in heaven" is essentially having heavenly attitudes. It is caring about each other. Each one of us knows from personal experience and from the observation of others that we do have ideals and that we do all too often fail to live up to them. We seem quite sure that we are capable of being better than we are. That is, we seem to know ourselves to be responsible; and in fact, our whole societal fabric is based on this kind of assumption. Our courts of law hold us responsible for our words

and our actions; and the only way we can try to claim any real exemption from that responsibility is to plead insanity.

Our first Scripture reading gives one of the most vivid images of this sense of responsibility. "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" Deuteronomy 30:19). The theme carries over into the first chapter of the next book of the Bible, Joshua, with its injunctions to "Be strong and courageous" in the first chapter (Joshua 1:6, 7, 9) and the covenant ceremony at its close, where Joshua says to the assembled people, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord " (Joshua 24:15).

The other side of the picture, the side that focuses on grace, also has ample biblical support. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell record Jesus words about how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven, the disciples' question as to who, then, can be saved, and the answer that what is impossible for us is possible for God (Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27, Luke 18:27). We are told in John that "No one can receive anything unless it is given from heaven" (John 3:27). or we might simply turn to the Lord's words at the close of Matthew's Gospel, "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). That does not leave much for us.

There is certainly a tension between these two views, between "law" on one hand and "grace" on the other. The most common way it is expressed in our theology is in one very simple little phrase, "as if of ourselves"-my search program tells me that it occurs four hundred and seventy-two times in the works that Swedenborg himself published. We are supposed to do what is good and refrain from what is evil "as if of ourselves," and yet are to acknowledge that this is "from the Lord."

It is put very bluntly the first time the phrase occurs: "There is no way that we can do what is good and turn to the Lord on our own. This must be done by angels; and the angels themselves cannot do it, only the Lord. Still, we can do it as if of ourselves" (Secrets of Heaven 233). Then in Divine Love and Wisdom (§425), we find the nub of the problem expressed: Since our whole sense is that we are thinking truth on our own and doing what is good on our own, though, it is quite clear that we ought to think what is true as if on our own and do what is good as if on our own. That is, if we do not believe this then we either do not think what is true or do what is good and therefore have no religion, or we think what is true and do what is good on our own and thereby claim as our own what is actually Divine.

Our third lesson puts the same tension together in a slightly different way. "Our own prudence is nothing. It only seems to be something, as it should" (Divine Providence 191). The passage goes on, as we have heard, to state quite unequivocally that we really do not know where our thoughts and feelings are coming from. The Lord does know, and is overseeing all the inner processes that are beyond both our perception and our comprehension.

Where does this leave us? Perhaps the simplest way of expressing it would be to say that it calls us to do the best we can from day to day and to stop pretending that we really know what is going on. We are finite creatures, and no matter how much we learn, our understanding will never get any closer to infinity. Or to put it another way, we never, in this life or the next, perceive things as they really, really are. In doctrinal terms, we never get beyond "appearances" (see especially Secrets of Heaven 3207:3).

This means that in spiritual matters, we can never "tell it like it is." We can only tell it the way we see it, and to claim that we are telling it like it is is to claim for ourselves what is Divine. If we stop there, though, we can use it as a license for irresponsibility, to forget about thinking what is true and doing what is good, leaving us with no religion at all. It is marvelously freeing to realize that we can do our very best to think what is true and do what is good and leave everything else up to the Lord.

Another way of saying much the same thing is to say that we can learn not to take ourselves with such ultimate seriousness. There was a sports columnist some years ago who advised the manager of the Red Sox to take a particular player out into the open, show him the sun, and explain very clearly and carefully to the ballplayer that he actually was not the center of the solar system. Physically, of course, we do perceive the world as stretching out around us on all sides, so we do perceive ourselves as the center of the universe. We need to get over that illusion.

For me, Helen Keller answered the question as concisely and precisely as anyone when she wrote, "There is joy in self-forgetfulness." This offers an answer to Sorokin's dilemma. It says that we are capable of altruism because we are capable of enjoying what we do without thinking about our enjoyment. Further, because we have some sensitivity to each other's feelings, we can find pleasure in the pleasure of others.

Certainly one trap that must be avoided at all costs is that doing good is not really good if we find pleasure in it. That would condemn us to an eternity of masochism. In a way, the very possibility of altruism rests in the fact that the higher and purer the good, the deeper and greater the joy. When we do things "of ourselves," that is, when we are

thinking about ourselves in what we do, we open the door to anxiety, envy, resentment, and ultimately despair. When we relax and do what we should because it is there to do and it is good to do it, when we focus on the doing and not our ourselves, we take a step from slavery into freedom.

We do live "as if," and that is O.K. Our prudence does seem to matter, and it should. But the angel on our shoulder is constantly whispering, "There is joy in self-forgetfulness. Don't take yourself so seriously." We would do well to listen.

Amen.



*Jesus, Zombie God?*

*September 16, 2018*

## READINGS

From Biblical Scripture

### Revelation 19:17-21

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

### Apocalypse Revealed 831-832

831. Revelation 19:17, "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God.'" This symbolizes the Lord, out of Divine love and so out of Divine zeal, calling all people who have a spiritual affection for truth and think about heaven, and summoning them to the New Church and to conjunction with Himself, thus to eternal life.

The angel standing in the sun means the Lord in His Divine love. The angel means the Lord, and the sun His Divine love. Crying with a loud voice means, symbolically, out of Divine zeal, for a voice or influx coming from the Lord out of Divine love is an expression of Divine zeal, inasmuch as zeal is a characteristic of love. Birds that fly in the midst of heaven symbolize all people who have a spiritual affection for truth and so think about heaven. To come and gather together for the supper of the great God symbolizes a calling and summoning to the New Church and to conjunction with the Lord; and because conjunction with the Lord is attended by eternal life, therefore this, too, is symbolically meant. To cry "come" symbolizes a calling, and "gather together" symbolizes a summoning.



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[2] That an angel in the Word means the Lord may be seen in nos. 5, 170, 258, 344, 465, 649, 657, 718 above, and the more so here because he was seen standing in the sun, and no angel appears in the sun. For the Lord is the sun in the spiritual world, and therefore the Lord alone is present in it. That the sun in reference to the Lord symbolizes Divine love may be seen in nos. 53 and 414. Clearly, to cry with a loud voice in reference to the Lord in His Divine love means, symbolically, to speak or flow in out of Divine zeal; for Divine zeal is a characteristic of Divine love, in this case for the salvation of humankind. That birds symbolize such things as are connected with the intellect and consequent thought may be seen in no. 757 above, and in this case people who have a spiritual affection for truth and think about heaven, since the cry is addressed to birds that fly in the midst of heaven, and to fly in the midst of heaven means, symbolically, to discern, focus on, and think (nos. 245, 415). That the supper of the great God symbolizes the New Church and thus conjunction with the Lord, may be seen in no. 816, where that supper is called the marriage supper of the Lamb.

832. [1] Revelation 19:18 "That you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of commanders, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." This symbolizes an assimilation of goods from the Lord through the truths in the Word and in doctrine drawn from it, of every level of meaning, degree or kind.

The subject of no. 831 above was conjunction with the Lord through the Word, and now here it is the assimilation of goods from Him through the Word's truths.

To eat symbolically means to assimilate (no. 89). The flesh the people were to eat symbolizes goods in the Word and so in the church. And kings, commanders, mighty men, horses and those who sit on them, and people, free and slave, both small and great symbolize truths of every level of meaning, degree or kind. Kings symbolize people governed by the church's truths from the Word, and abstractly the church's truths from the Word themselves (nos. 20, 483). Commanders symbolize people who possess concepts of goodness and truth, and abstractly those concepts themselves (no. 337). Mighty men symbolize people who are learned in doctrine from the Word, and abstractly the learning gained from there itself (no. 337). Horses symbolize an understanding of the Word, and those who sit on them symbolize people who are wise owing to their understanding of the Word, and abstractly the wisdom gained from there itself (nos. 298, 820). People free and slave symbolize people who acquire knowledge on their own and people who gain it from others (nos. 337, 604). People small and great symbolize people who do so to a lesser or greater degree (nos. 527, 810).

It is apparent from this that the people's being called to eat the flesh of those listed symbolizes an assimilation of goods from the Lord through the truths in the Word and in doctrine drawn from it, of every level of meaning, degree or kind.



## Jesus, Zombie God?

What a trip today's reading are aren't they? Gorging on the flesh of kings and generals? Jesus killing with a sword coming out of his mouth? Of course, this is only getting started; Christ rises from the dead, raises and promises to raise others, and requests that we dine on her flesh. How in the world are we to make sense of depictions like these and why are they considered scripture? Is Jesus some type of Zombie God, actually deeply concerned with the consumption of flesh and a murderous immortality?

This is where I might rebuff criticisms of scripture due to its "inherent" holiness or just shrug and find a random detail to riff on, pointing to the unbreakable cryptology of God. I hope to do neither, but I'll settle for just hints of both and the effort toward more.



In the 18th century, Emanuel Swedenborg shared a phrase that he said he saw on a gate in Heaven, one that many Swedenborgian churches have decided to adorn their worship spaces with: "Now it is permitted." He explains this meant, "One may now enter with understanding the mysteries of faith" (*True Christianity*, #508). This assumes that there may have been a time that we were not able to enter, but nevertheless Swedenborg's commentary on and exploration of Revelation has definitely helped me understand scripture's cryptic descriptions in a new light.

In fact, it was Swedenborg's verse-by-verse "exegesis" of Revelation that started to align all the scriptural stars in my head, stars collected over many years of hearing my father's and grandfather's scriptural pontificating. Up until that journey, I considered Biblical scripture and others as just a jumbled mass of nonsense, largely meant to appease certain niches and uplift cultural history and tradition. How could these scriptures be scripture? What could be holy about any story or book? I definitely heard nothing too special from them, besides some nice narratives, beautiful Psalms, and quirky reflections from Christ.

Wow, did I have my mind blown - indeed, I felt my worldview shift again and again throughout my reading of Swedenborg's *Apocalypse Revealed* (to be named *Revelation Unveiled* in the upcoming translation). You see, in this exegesis, Swedenborg explores the parable or metaphor of scripture. Now, he doesn't just tell us what a phrase or word means ad hoc-ly, he reflects on its context and explores where that phrase shows up throughout scripture, which in itself often reveals that something that sounds literal in an instance is often defined as a metaphor or a "correspondence" to something spiritual in other Biblical verses. Further, Swedenborg makes the case that we should generally be picking up those spiritual, metaphorical indications and definitions and carry them forward to the repeat uses of the phrase.

Amazingly, it seemed to me that scripture was making that case as well! Scripture tells us that it is speaking in deep spiritual metaphor, and helps us decipher it pretty consistently. And things started to make sense in a way that they never had before; obscure meanings started to become illuminated and comprehensive in ways that I could never have imagined. I couldn't believe my mind as my misgivings, skepticisms, and cynicism were repeatedly overthrown. I really didn't want to believe that scripture could be holy, and yet, there I was, starting to! Moreover, Swedenborg also described how these types of metaphors abound in the spiritual realm - his purported visions describe a trippy spiritual environment much like the book of Revelation's, filled with meaning, community, and life. In fact, he says that the Lord opened his spiritual vision in order to help confirm the spiritual metaphors and correspondences of scripture!

Furthermore, Swedenborg didn't find all "scripture" made equal, although he had quite the interfaith and transcendent view of what constitutes it and the "Word." There are a number of books of the Bible in fact that didn't quite make scriptural status for him - he had the audacity to think that often someone's letter to a community was just that, a letter.

Interestingly though, he also thought scriptural status could be found in other books and religions in this world and beyond. And in a way, he also thought we can perceive scripture in the natural world around us and in our experiences if we look at these with our eyes illumined. The "Word," in his most broad view of this eminent label, is inherent in the fabric, structure, and community of all created things. Even in our dynamic relationship with Paul's historical letter to the Corinthians can a scriptural thread be cultivated and viewed, even if it is "just" a letter.

With all that said, maybe Swedenborg can illuminate what the heck "eating the flesh of kings" means!

It is not lost on Swedenborg that eating human flesh is a repeat trope of the Christian gospels and the book of Revelation. Indeed, as you probably know, in Christian history there have been untold number of controversies surrounding the Holy Supper, typically considered a sacrament where Christians eat bread and drink wine while also eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood, an act believed to be either metaphorical or actual, depending on the individual's Christian lineage and view. This sacrament and Christians' varying ideas about it are based on a story where Christ gives bread and wine to her disciples, commanding them to eat her flesh and drink her blood in remembrance of her. Unfortunately, a lot of flesh and blood has been actually shed due to disagreements around how literal this is to be taken.

May sound silly at first, but often we get caught up in literal interpretations of scripture or our theologies - ultimately, treating them as dead and shallow, unable to truly speak, misusing them to consume the flesh of others for our own dominance and perceived immortality. We may even use the deadened, isolationist approach of our worldview to try to destroy the rational, thinking capacity of others and ourselves, effectively seeking to consume their brains.

In the literal text, Jesus not only has a sword coming out of his mouth that he kills with, he also commands others to eat his flesh and drink his blood, is described as being in a robe covered in blood in Revelation, of having glowing eyes, and one of his angels is said to command all of us to gather and eat the flesh of all people, one and all. Does that mean we eat each other? What a picture scripture paints: Jesus Christ the Zombie God, riding a white horse in a bloody robe commanding that we all feast in what would be a gruesome scene worthy of peak George Romero.

Swedenborg says that these descriptions are extremely ripe with meaning. Not only are these literal descriptions similar to how we act when we treat scripture as purely literally and concrete - like zombies, but the deeper metaphor of these depictions are potent in their promises for us and in their deep reflections on our reality in a positive sense. We quite literally receive all sustenance from the Divine - and this sustenance, whether it be physical food or spiritual, is quite literally made up of the Word, made up of Goddess. As I described earlier, the Word, Jesus, Sophia, Divine Truth, is the fundamental structure and community of all things. So this doesn't mean that the bread we eat turns into flesh, but that all bread is already God's flesh, all sustenance and goodness is fundamentally part of the body of Divinity. All the royalty, wisdom, and goodness that lets a general be a leader, a person be truly human, are the flesh gifted from the Holy meant to be shared among us for our mutual benefit, growth, and spiritual immortality - Zombies indeed!

Furthermore, on a spiritual level "bread" and "flesh" correspondentially often mean "goodness" in scripture, at least according to Swedenborg as well as a brief review of where these words appear in the Bible. "Wine" and "blood" typically represent truth (or when used in the negative, falsity), and you can probably guess what consuming these things may mean. A sword coming out of Christ's mouth is the power of wisdom spoken from the Higher One, able to render flesh - separate truth from falsity, goodness from evil. Killing with this sword actually refers to these separations (allowing falsity to truly die - the "second death" as the Bible calls it), but also to the transformative, redemptive impact of this wisdom. Like when a zombie kills, often in Swedenborg's reading of scripture "death" symbolically means spiritual rebirth.

All life and physics are dependent on truth, structure, and connection (the lifeblood of creation), as well as dependent on these connections being incarnate and put into greater use: incarnations that we call goodness, life. Freedom allows for a level of seeming chaos and disorder, but overall, each level of structure is put into greater use for higher connection, wisdom, and more goodness: a cascade of communities that exist from microscopic particles, to what we call life and humanity, to other macroscopic ecologies, all of which express Divinity's "body" in seemingly infinite, finite forms. And each form is meant to be received graciously as the body of Christ and used for our mutual life (human and beyond)! The more we lean into the goodness and truth that we receive (instead of destruction and falsity) the more we drink deeply of Divinity and the God within each other, and we are especially empowered, enlivened, and humbled when we remember where it's all coming from.

I could probably keep writing on this fascinating subject, but I'm getting hungry. Perhaps, while you listen to our closing songs, you could check out *Apocalypse Revealed* for yourself. Beware, the driest, flakiest parts of this book are in the early descriptions of the state of "today's" churches, feel free to skim through this to get to the meat (or should I say the spirit?) of it ;)



*Fear Neutralizer by Rev. David Brown*

*September 23, 2018*

## READINGS

### From Biblical Scripture

#### **Psalm 116, New Revised Standard Version**

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;

I suffered distress and anguish.

Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, save my life!" Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.

The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted"; I said in my consternation, "Everyone is a liar."

What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.

O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.

You have loosed my bonds.

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,

In the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

#### **Luke 24:13-49, New Revised Standard Version**

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes



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were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."



From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

## Emanuel Swedenborg, True Christianity §89

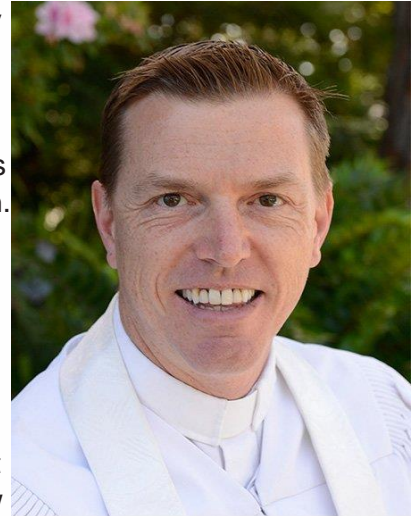
"It is the law of divine design that the closer and closer we come to God, which is something we have to do as if we were completely on our own, the closer and closer God comes to us. When we meet, God forms a partnership with us."

# Fear Neutralizer

by Rev. David Brown

A sermon delivered at Wayfarer's Chapel, the National Monument to Emanuel Swedenborg in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, and sourced from [SpiritualQuesters.org](#) - a ministry of the Swedenborgian Church

The Roman philosopher Tacitus observed, "The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise." Please do not get me wrong, I have a healthy regard for caution when needed, but this statement lends itself nicely towards living an authentic spiritual life in the here and now. Too often we can find ourselves clinging to outdated life-patterns that are not necessarily our own. It is great to have formation and guidance but at some point, we step out into the uncertainties of life on our own and take that great leap of faith into the unknown.



It is a sentiment that somehow lends itself to the line from Psalm 116, "I walk before the Lord in the land of the living." In this great mystery of life, none of us here know with absolute authority how our next moments of life are going to go, let alone years or decades. What we can control and deepen is our relation to this moment and to the living God and how we respond to life events. This practice that can help to forge an authentic walk before the Lord in the land of the living. It also shifts the phrase of Tacitus from a desire for safety to one of who dwells in the shelter of the most high (Psalm 91:1). It is an invitation to continue our dialogue with the Lord who can see around the corners of life and to share this conversation with others along the journey.

In an era where social media and a steady stream of commentary is shared online that would never be said face-to-face with another human being, it is refreshing to examine today's scripture and tease-out the intensely personal way that the resurrected Jesus interacts with those who knew him in human form. It is a timeless message and an invitation to us all to be more compassionate with one another through the challenges of living in this physical dimension.



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There is another aspect to this scripture passage that also emphasizes the importance and value of engaging with another human at a deeper level of existence. The invitation to become spiritually transformed through that dynamic experience where something ineffable is exchanged between us. It is like spiritual fire leaping out from our physical heart, corresponding to that pure divine love that is unstoppable and unquenchable for those ready to receive it. It is also a reminder that as valuable as it is to have time alone, the real spiritual work is with the 'other' and the exchange that takes place only in community. These concepts were modeled by our Lord, amplified through the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and most recently Pope Francis has become an important advocate for talking the talk and walking the walk of what we are all called to be in this world as disciples of God. Last week Pope Francis echoed this same sentiment using the platform of a TED talk calling for a, "Revolution of Tenderness."

It can be all too easy these days to get caught up the fears of the day. Why is it that we allow ourselves to be frightened and to allow doubts to arise in our hearts? Most of us can find ourselves in this scripture story quite easily where our doubts get stirred-up and our fears get exploited. The resurrected Jesus on the way to the village of Emmaus models a way of being spiritually present with our fellow human travelers. Appearing once again in Jerusalem to his disciples he asks, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" These words were spoken from Christ-Consciousness in the vertical dimension of time and strike through the millennia, piercing our modern day hearts and sensibilities anew.

The mystery of the resurrection is something that we continue to wrestle with just as the original disciples did. The challenge of remaining in a loving space and not giving in to fear is a very real thing and it does require constant rigorous spiritual discernment on our part. Who do we allow into our hearts and how can we not get pulled into the fury and frenzy of fear?

The propagation of fake news and polarizing hate groups we have witnessed here in the United States and abroad are reminders of how easy it can be to succumb to fear and for that fear to be exploited. The other mystic and scientist Albert Einstein reminds us all of the value of not getting pulled down to lower spiritual realms with his quote, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."

So let us revisit this story and examine how the resurrected Jesus enters into it. It is interesting to note the approach that Jesus takes in joining the travelers. It is a very gentle and subtle movement that initiates the partnering of the two on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus as we search the scripture. "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?'" Notice how Jesus joins the travelers and is there with a listening ear and an active curiosity about what their experience is regarding recent events. It is a model of infinite patience, tenderness, and a listening, compassionate heart that the Lord enters into their dialogue while traveling along the road. Upon registering the

question they are described as standing still and looking sad. Cleopas then goes on to describe all the powerful events in detail from the past several days.

Notice how it took this moment of patient inquiry to unlock the emotions residing within Cleopas? This is one of the great travesties of our modern world. People are so rushed and in a hurry that we rarely encounter these moments with another human being who is waiting patiently with compassion to find out what is really going on within us. As we notice in this passage, it is this spiritual presence and gentle inquiry that contains the power to unlock the inner dimensions of the heart. Even through this journeying with them, the resurrected Jesus does not force the issue of his presence with the two men as they approach the village. Jesus continues on down the road and would have kept going had he not been encouraged to stay a little while longer. Swedenborg has something to offer in this matter in regards to how divine design operates.

"It is the law of divine design that the closer and closer we come to God, which is something we have to do as if we were completely on our own, the closer and closer God comes to us. When we meet, God forms a partnership with us." - Swedenborg, True Christianity 89

This law of divine design shows up in the way that the risen Lord enters the scene on the road to Emmaus and engages in initiating the conversation with compassion and curiosity. Of course we know that the risen Lord knows what has happened and within it lies a deep spiritual lesson here to learn as well. The lesson of attaining inner spiritual stillness when engaging in dialogue with another person and connecting to that deeper level of our soul within ourself when attempting to relate deeply to another human being. When we meet at that level, a true partnership is formed where it is not just two or three of us gathered together. This 'other' holy presence has joined in the partnership as well. The Holy Spirit or Divine Proceeding is now able to be felt when we have these sacred moments with another.

In our scripture story, we also notice a gradual progression of how the Lord appears to travelers on the road. First, it is as a complete stranger, joining in the conversation with curiosity and questions about recent events and yes, he does chastise them a bit for being a bit too, 'Slow of heart' and not picking-up what he was spiritually laying-down. But it worked! That exchange of dialogue was enough of a real conversation that the travelers decided to invite the Lord to stay for dinner. Enough of a partnership had transpired and been reignited in that short journey to move them to an open dinner invitation. It is here at dinner where the Lord finally reveals his true identity. "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

Another important lesson for us here is that it is in within that moment of recognition, the Lord vanishes from our sight. The Lord has once again accomplished what he set out to do and is on

to other important matters, such as appearing to the disciples and reminding them not to freak out that this amazing thing has happened. Jesus said, "Peace be with you...Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" Fears can cloud our judgement and get in the way of seeing one another clearly. Through the deepening of our relationship to the living God, we can rest in deep assurance and thereby neutralize our fears. We glorify the Lord whenever we gather together in this fashion.

This understanding is universal and I believe is why Pope Francis felt compelled to go live on TED and describe in great detail his own understanding of how this process works. In his words, "The Revolution of Tenderness" is simply the recognition that there is this sense of the sacred within each of us and we need to feel that connection in order to relate deeply to another human being. Only then are we also acting in the world like the change agents of transformation that the Lord calls us to be. In this fashion, we are clothed from up on high. May the Lord so help us all.

Amen.



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*Do Not Fear: Walk on Water*

*September 30, 2018*

**READINGS**  
**From Biblical Scripture**

**Matthew 14:25-33**

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him.

From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

Arcana Coelestia / Secrets of Heaven 790

'Waters' here and in what follows means falsities. This becomes clear from the places in the Word quoted in the preliminary section of this chapter 1 and from those at verse 6 of this chapter [Genesis 7], where the flood or inundation of waters is the subject. In those places it was shown that 'inundations of waters' meant desolations and temptations, which entail the same thing as falsities, for desolations and temptations are nothing else than inundations of falsities that have been activated by evil spirits. The reason why such waters mean falsities is that generally 'waters' in the Word means that which is spiritual, that is, that which is intellectual, rational, and factual. And since waters mean these they also mean their opposites, for every falsity is a factual matter, and seemingly rational and intellectual since it is a matter belonging to thought.



## Do Not Fear: Walk on Water

"Once there was a way to get back homeward," this quote from the Beatles song Golden Slumbers rings in my head quite often. The underlying tone of it is one of loss, perhaps of fear, but in a way, it can be read as an optimistic statement; there is a home for us. And the beauty of its music and this hint toward an intrinsic home lends itself to our hopes to mean we will find the way once again.

However, fear often causes us to despair of ever finding a home, a peace for us individually and for society, despite our gravitation toward our obscure sense of this peace, hope, and gratitude. We fear that we will not heal, that we will never be whole, that more pain is coming, that we'll continue to err, and if cosmic justice exists it will work against our favor.



Fear tackles our hearts and shackles our breath, it pulls us into its fantasy, or our fantasy pulls us into our fear, and we can often be moved to depression, hate, jealousy, and lust due to it - to distract us from or to externalize it onto others. For some, it rocks our every step, a distortion to our joy and peace whenever we aren't distracted. We may become neurotic, if only for a better sense of control and to develop habits that bring us more into the present moment.

And yet, scriptures repeatedly tell us not to fear! As is oft said, "Do not fear" is the most prevalent phrase in the Christian Bible. But for those of us who have gone through trauma, no matter the age, fear is often a fundamental part of our reality, our worldview. We may not even think of ourselves as particularly fearful - just woke, vigilant, streetwise. Deep vigilance and the spike of adrenaline follow us as we're shaped by the impact of our tragedies and horrors. Scripture says that living in our fear is a fantasy, but the fantasies of our fear are all too real to us.

Whether the fantasy or the fear came first is no matter, they walk in lockstep like light and heat, truth and love. Fear blossoms in an experience and echoes in our PTSD, in our deep impression that the experience never really ended and is just around the corner. Sometimes fear comes when there's something in our living and intending that is deeply out of order with health - spiritual, emotional, or physical. And fear can also come when we get caught up in social expectations for reputation's sake, pressuring ourselves in response to external pressure, becoming victim to our victimizing economy and social structures.

But know this: our tragedies, our injuries, and our fears are in the care of the sacred, the Holy One never left us even in the midst of them. She is always our vulnerability, our heart, our consciousness in and out of the pain, our intrinsic power and ability to create and transform for the better. She is within the humility of our seeming helplessness,



uplifting our beauty and spirit, pointing toward our eventual, eternal, actual, miraculous, glorious health and never-ending recovery. Goddess is the goodness blooming and ready to bloom in us, God and her qualities are the promised land of plenty and peace in this world and the underlying one. She is our goodness, our strength, our consciousness, and yet so much more: all goodness, all strength, all's Savior, all's Shepherd.

The trick is to start to open ourselves more to this Divine's presence in the place of our fantasies, as he often tells us in scripture. Lean into becoming more attune to her command not to fear and what she hopes for us instead.

"Walk on water," he says. We may seem to slip at first, perhaps often, but I think it takes our leap of faith to truly heal; we have to accept mindfully God's power and personal wish for us to walk on the water of our fear, of our trauma, never needing to sink again.

This is a tough idea to accept because its easy to see that trauma can happen again, no matter how skillful our prayers. But again, Divinity tasks us to walk on water: to not fear even in the midst of horror, knowing that the Sun is still present although seemingly obscure. Knowing that the Holy One guides us in ours and the Universe's freewill toward herself, both from within and without. Although there's the possibility of destruction and pain to a degree due to the freedom inherent in the universe, our Higher Power understands and hopes to convey the inevitability of his descending, emerging Kin-dom and that she is closer than our jugular vein - closer to us than our obscure reflections and even our most striking anxieties.

So that's it, right? We're healed, golden, godly.

No, of course it's a process. The process of understanding and accepting that Peace is the Source of our Life, That Peace Is Our Deepest True Desire, and we find it, we feel it, the more we're willing to remember, receive, and live it both in our spirit and in the world.

For me, this process of accepting peace in the midst of burden, selfishness, and fear has recently began with just remembering that Divinity, "the Universe" for some, hopes to convey this peace and communal gratitude, love, and joy to me in every moment. And that I have good reason to feel gratitude and I'm built to receive joy instead of fear! It's been a long road for me, the trauma's and egotism's remembered and ancestral often creep in and I find my self caught in a cycle of fantasy and fear. But Goddess has a plan to heal me, if I let him - now or later. She has a plan to heal you too.

Often this takes being willing to see my current state as one of narcissism - one of self-gratification and self-deprecation, of defensives, a state where I easily project these things and their judgments onto others in one way or another. From there, I try to find my breath and release my current pressing fantasy. This is in accordance and complimentary with an overall effort toward releasing fear and my egotistical desires and projections: key transformational hopes for us in scripture the world over.

Let us remember Peace right now, and invite its precepts into our current perspective. Allowing that to transform our moving and intending.

Like a light shining in the void, a reorientation toward Godly, meditative Peace while releasing some of our destructive fantasy often illuminates a situation in a way altogether new. We step from fear toward joy and gratitude, from fantasy toward truth and clarity.

The shift away from fear and selfishness can happen in the blink of an eye and from there we're tasked to walk on water through God's power. We must accept the miracle of our transformed walk in the world, as well as work to maintain and improve our habit of walking in and back into Divinity's Peace - a walk on top of a bitter water, above it even during the situations we would have once been in fear or deep selfishness. As the gratitude of the miracle of our new walk surrounds us, let us continue to explore our motivations and our living to allow Christ to transform and save us even more from our fearful destructiveness, while also fortifying our newfoundland.



*Near-Death Experiences & Swedenborg*

*October 7, 2018*

**READINGS**  
**From Biblical Scripture**

**Revelation 21 (NIV)**

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth, 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 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.”

6 He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

From [Emanuel Swedenborg's Theological Writings](#)

**From Divine Love & Wisdom (NCE)**

LOVE is our life. For most people, the existence of love is a given, but the nature of love is a mystery. As for the existence of love, this we know from everyday language. We say that someone loves us, that monarchs love their subjects, and that subjects love their monarch. We say that a husband loves his wife and that a mother loves her children, and vice versa. We say that people love their country, their fellow citizens, their neighbor. We use the same language about impersonal objects, saying that someone loves this or that thing.

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. Wise people can grasp this when you ask, "If you take away the effects of love, can you think anything? Can you do anything? As the effects of love lose their warmth, do not thought and speech and action lose theirs as well? Do they not warm up as love warms up?"

## Reflections on Near-Death Experiences & Swedenborg

by Rev. Wilma Wake

### A Glimpse of Heaven - August 5, 2012

Recently, 20/20 did a two-hour special called Heaven: Where is it and How do you Get there?" One woman who unexpectedly died for four minutes after giving birth, said death "was the best experience of her life." She said she had a "glimpse of heaven" and instantly knew that life was eternal.

Dr. Raymond Moody is perhaps the best known researcher on Near Death Experiences. Moody has a doctorate in philosophy, in psychology, and an M.D. He wrote a book in 1975 called "Life After Life," that gave accounts of patients of his who had clinically died, yet returned to tell a story of a life after death. The term "near death experience" came into use at that time. Moody's research into the subject included reading works of Emanuel Swedenborg because Swedenborg's accounts of his visits to heaven are similar to what Moody was seeing in NDE's.

One of the most respected organizations researching NDE's is the [International Association of Near-Death Studies \[IANDS\]](#). For many years, they have been collecting stories of people's accounts of dying and then returning.

Here is one account from their archives:

*Experience entered into the IANDS Archives February 5, 2002:*

*I was with my partner at the time and we had been going through difficulties. I had felt this strong sense of loss and I felt that something was calling me. I then ended up taking chloroform. I could feel the effects straight away, this creeping relaxing feeling and the sensation of me slipping out of something that felt like prison. I could remember being in the hospital on the ceiling watching all these doctors and nurses attending to me. I could also hear my mum and brother talking to me asking me why this had happened. It felt warm and radiant like some one was with me at this time and they were conveying a feeling of peace and love that was something I had never ever felt before.*

*In no time I was traveling down this tunnel with beings on either side. It felt like I knew them all and they were talking to me asking me how I am and what had been going on in my life. They also showed me something that I could not recall but it felt familiar. After a while with them I was called towards the light and I felt so overwhelmingly loving,*

*peaceful and knowing. I was asked a series of questions and given information about things by an angel with a staff and dressed in warrior outfit, resembling an African chief and then a decision was made that it was not my time and that I had a mission to fulfill and that I will return. I cannot remember anything after that.*

*I woke up in the same bed in intensive care and was told that I had died and was kept alive via a ventilator and I had been unconscious for 1 week. Since that time I have had flashbacks and been aware that there are spirit guides around protecting me and guiding me. I also have this strong sense that there was a vision of some sort given to me because it's like I've been on this sacred mission regarding utilizing this experience to empower people and tell the world about the realms of the spirit and their advice and guidance for the human population, especially with the young people.*

People who have NDE's are encouraged to send them to IANDS for their archives. Here is another account:

### *Blocked by a Golden Being*

*Riding my bike past a golf course, I see a van run a stop sign; however, I'm unable to swerve out of his way. I'm staring through the van's windshield at the driver and hoping he doesn't hit his brakes. He does, though, and now I'm flying. It's an odd sensation to be sailing through the air like some sort of awkward flightless bird. I don't remember hitting the pavement because I was distracted by the intensely bright column of white light shining out of the top of my body's head. I have only a moment to grasp that I'm outside of my body, and then, swoosh! I'm sucked up the column of light like an envelope in a pneumatic mail tube.*

*I'm standing in a place of love. It's completely enveloping, and I'm thoroughly immersed in feelings of loving acceptance, calmness, and of being home (of belonging). There's a glow of golden light ahead of me in the distance, and I need and want to get there. But as I take a step forward, a golden being blocks my way. Humanoid in shape, there are no features, no clothes, nothing but a glowing being who exudes an overwhelming sense of calm and agape. The right hand of the being is raised palm outward in a stopping motion, and in my head I hear, "You must go back."*

*I'm devastated. I don't want to go back. I want to stay in this place of love. It shakes its head, hand still in that stop position, and in my head I hear, "It's not yet your time. You must go back." "No, please--I want to stay..." I think back. And suddenly there is a horrible shrieking sound that pierces my head. I'm back in my body, which is lying on the street, and I'm screaming. There are EMTs and other people hovering around me, and the driver of the van is on his cell phone. I was only gone for a few seconds, maybe a minute, yet it seemed longer. The feelings of disappointment, of missing out on something stupendous, were strong.*

*I need and want to get back (to stay), but until then the short trips I now take seem to help me. Each time I've stepped over the barrier between this life and the next, it's been*



*to help someone who is dying. Since the accident I've found myself acting as a guide to those crossing over. I understand their fears, and it has helped me overcome mine, too. My fear was that it wasn't real, that it was a dream and that I'd never get that loving feeling back. But I can, and I do, and that has helped me overcome the horrible disappointment I felt in having to come back.*

*I now know that I can cross over there and experience those feelings again and again, and once I'm done with my life here, I know what's waiting for me, so I'm not afraid. And I'm not afraid to help others with their fears, either.*

The International Association of Near Death Experience has collective massive data about NDE's, and has put together a list of the [most common characteristics of the experience:](#)

*Characteristics of a Near-Death Experience Most NDE's are felt as peaceful and loving, but some are disturbing. Each near death experience is unique, but as a group NDEs display common features.*

- *Intense emotions: commonly of profound peace, well-being, love; others marked by fear, horror, loss*
- *A perception of seeing one's body from above (called an out-of-body experience, or OBE), sometimes watching medical resuscitation efforts or moving instantaneously to other places*
- *Rapid movement through darkness, often toward an indescribable light*
- *A sense of being "somewhere else," in a landscape that may seem like a spiritual realm or world*
- *Incredibly rapid, sharp thinking and observations*
- *Encounter with deceased loved ones, possibly sacred figures (the Judges, Jesus, a saint) or unrecognized beings, with whom communication is mind-to-mind; these figures may seem consoling, loving, or terrifying*
- *A life review, reliving actions and feeling their emotional impact on others*
- *In some cases, a flood of knowledge about life and the nature of the universe*
- *Sometimes a decision to return to the body*

The afterlife is a topic of much interest to Swedenborgians because of Emanuel Swedenborg's experiences and writings. We have a lot to contribute to the modern conversation on the nature of heaven.

Have you ever had an experience of medically dying, and encountering a beautiful heaven? A number of the people on our site were drawn to us because of their own NDE's, and desire to understand Swedenborg's perspective on them.

### **Life After Near-Death - August 26, 2012**

What we often call "near-death experiences" do not always occur at the moment of death. [IANDS](#) defines NDE's as:



A near-death experience (NDE) is a profound psychological event that may occur to a person close to death or, if not near death, in a situation of physical or emotional crisis. Because it includes transcendental and mystical elements, an NDE is a powerful event of consciousness; it is not mental illness.

When I read that definition, I realized that I had had an NDE many years ago. I didn't die clinically, so I haven't considered it an NDE. However, I was certainly in physical and emotional crisis which exploded into a transcendental experience that changed my life.

It took place one summer afternoon around 1994. I was sitting in the yard with my cats. Marty, a new stray cat who had come to live with me, attacked my little kitty Starhawk. I pulled Marty off Starhawk, and he plunged his claws into my leg. Immediately, I felt intense pain. I got concerned as a thick red line was slowly moving up my leg. I drove myself to the E.R., where they said it looked like blood poisoning; I had to start antibiotics right away. They said that in generations past, this could easily be fatal, as the infection made its way to my heart. They gave me a shot and sent me home, telling me to return if the red line hadn't stopped moving in a few hours.

Several hours later, the red line was marching along up my leg towards my torso. I was feeling very sick, so I drove myself back to the E.R. I was taken to a small room and told to lie down on the examining table. Then I was left alone. Suddenly, I was above my body and feeling incredible. I felt better than I had ever felt before. My mind was clear and sharp and I felt so completely "me."

Most astounding was the Presence I felt with me. I had never before felt so loved. It was not just "love," however. It was a love that came from knowing me absolutely and completely. No one had ever known me as this Presence did. And out of that knowing came perfect love. I knew that I could never do anything that would end that love for me. It is that feeling that remains with me since that encounter. I had never before – and have never since – felt simultaneously totally known and totally loved.

I felt that I was being asked a question. Did I want to come home now? It seemed to me that I had a choice. I didn't feel that I was at the moment of death. But it seemed that my infection could be cured or it could cause my death; I had a choice. I wanted to move deeper into this profound love and never leave! Yet, there was so much more I wanted to do, be, and learn in life. With sadness, I said I wanted to return. As soon as that thought formed in my mind, I was back in my body, feeling sick. The ER room door opened, and a doctor and nurse came in with an IV. I was hooked up to an IV antibiotic and put in the hospital over-night. At some point in the next few hours, an antibiotic finally took hold and the red line began to disappear. I was glowing with ecstasy for days afterwards.

Something has been different in my life ever since. In even my darkest times, I remember being known and loved. I don't have the slightest doubting cell anywhere in my body that I will have that experience again when I leave my body for good. It has

enriched my time here. I feel so certain that I will be "home" eventually, that each day – each moment – of earthly life feels more precious.

I have read on the [IANDS website](#) that research shows that most people with a Near Death Experience have similar changes in their life. From them:

*Around eighty percent of the people who experienced near-death states claimed that their lives were forever changed by what happened to them. On closer examination, though, a pattern of surprising dimensions emerged. Experiencers were not returning with just a renewed zest for life and a more spiritual outlook. They were evidencing specific psychological and physiological differences on a scale never before faced by them. And this was true with child experiencers, as well as with teenagers and adults.*

These are the primary psychological changes in NDErs, according to research:

- Loss of the fear of death
- Near-death experiencers come to love and accept others more easily.
- Most experiencers develop a sense of timelessness.
- Experiencers often become quite intuitive.
- Forgiveness usually becomes more important than criticism.
- Although the world is the same, the experiencer isn't any different, so the purpose of life seems more profound.

It is no coincidence that Dr. Raymond Moody, one of the founders of IANDS in the 1970's, was a reader of Swedenborg [*Editor's Note: He also wrote about Swedenborg in his books*]. The accounts of modern-day journeys to the spirit world are quite similar to what Swedenborg wrote about - especially in *Heaven & Hell*. Swedenborg tells us about the loving angels who are with us each step of the way as we move out of our bodies. Swedenborg was invited to visit the spirit world and to experience the process of leaving one's body without being physically dead. He was given extensive tours of the heavens so that he could write about it for the benefit of all of us. Most people do not have a "near death experience." However, Swedenborg would say that we don't need to have them. We can learn from the accounts of others, which inspire our comprehension of the spirit world, while keeping us grounded in the earthly world where we are actively engaged in our life purpose.

What is it like for you to read about the encounters others have had with the spirit world; Swedenborg, as well as modern experiencers? How can it inspire you in the fulfilling of your life purposes?

### **Swedenborg Visits Heaven - September 9, 2012**

When Dr. Raymond Moody was first learning about near death experiences, he turned to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was probably the first modern reporter of the journey to heaven and back.

The story is told in great detail in the book, [Heaven and Hell](#) (pdf).

George Dole, the translator of the New Century Edition, says,

*Secrets of Heaven belongs on the theologian's bookshelf. Heaven and Hell might feel at home in the airport book rack.*

The book gave the foundation of his theology:

*It may not be amiss to alert the reader to the presence in Heaven and Hell of a pervasive ethical concern. ...For him personally, that is, experiences of the spiritual world were not an avenue of escape from earthly responsibilities. There is a recurrent emphasis in Heaven and Hell on a generous, honest, and useful life here and now as the only viable foundation for heavenly life hereafter.*

The book begins with a theoretical explanation of the theology of the Lord and the after-life. But, I'd like to focus on Part II: The World of Spirits and Our State After Death. In this section, [Swedenborg] talks about the experience of traveling to heavens; an account that has some similarity to others who encounter a near death experience.

He was told that he was being given the experience that people have when they die, but with a memory to return to the earth:

*449 I was brought into a state in which my physical senses were inoperative—very much, then, like the state of people who are dying. However, my deeper life and thought remained intact so that I could perceive and retain what was happening to me*

He is clear that “death” is a kind of awakening.

*445 We can see, then, that when we die we simply move from one world into another. This is why in the inner meaning of the Word, This is why in the inner meaning of the Word, a “death” means resurrection and a continuation of life.*

He explains the mechanics of the transition:

*447 After this separation, our spirit stays in the body briefly, but not after the complete stoppage of the heart, which varies depending on the cause of death. In some cases the motion of the heart continues for quite a while, and in others it does not. The moment it does stop, we are awakened, but this is done by the Lord alone. “Being awakened” means having our spirit led out of our body and into the spiritual world, which is commonly called “resurrection.”*

He is clear that we continue to have a body and all of the bodily sensations:

*[3] This is why almost all the people who arrive from this world are as astonished as they can be to find that they are alive and that they are just as human as ever, that they are seeing and hearing and talking, that their bodies are still endowed with the sense of touch, and that nothing at all has changed (see §74 above).*

New arrivals in heaven can find it hard to grasp that people on earth are preparing to bury their body:

*451 This first stage of our life after death does not last more than a few days, though. In the following pages I will be describing how we are then brought from one state into another until finally we arrive either in heaven or in hell. This too is something I have been allowed to learn from a great deal of experience. 452 I have talked with some people on the third day after their death, when the events described in §§449 and 450 have been completed. I talked with three whom I had known in the world and told them that their funeral services were now being planned so that their bodies could be buried. When they heard me say it was so that they could be buried, they were struck with a kind of bewilderment. They said that they were alive, and that people were burying what had been useful to them in the world. Later on, they were utterly amazed at the fact that while they had been living in their bodies they had not believed in this kind of life after death, and particularly that this was the case for almost everyone in the church.*

Throughout *Heaven and Hell*, he gives details about the world of work, worship, and the arts that exists. It shows us a heaven that is not filled with winged angels sitting on clouds playing harps. It is a continuation of the life we have on earth, with spirits following their deepest passions to find useful work.

He offers a crucial human secret:

*460 Finally, I should like to offer a secret no one has ever known before, namely that everything good and true that comes from the Lord and makes heaven is in the human form. This is true not only of the greatest whole but also of every least part. This form influences everyone who accepts what is good and true from the Lord, and causes everyone in heaven to be in a human form according to that acceptance. This is why heaven is consistent with itself in general and in particular, why the human form is the form of the whole, of each community, and of each angel, as explained in the four chapters from §59 to §80. I need to add here that this is also the form of the details of thought that come from heavenly love in angels. This secret may not fit well into the understanding of anyone on earth, but it is clear to the understanding of angels because they are in heaven's light.*

Swedenborg's description of heaven was quite radical for its time, but it is a view we are more familiar with today since so many people have shared near-death experiences.

Does Swedenborg's accounts of the after-life give you a deeper theological framework for understanding modern near-death experiences?

How do you anticipate your own journey to heaven? What people and experiences do you expect to encounter?

Does Swedenborg's accounts change your view of the after-life – or of your life today?

*A Time to Care*

*October 14, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical Scripture**

Colossians 3:12

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Proverbs 3:1-8

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Psalms 31:7-16

I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors! Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!



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Isaiah 65:17-19

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

Revelation 21:4-5

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new!”

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

## A Time To Care

Often we accept our excuses for why we react and act the way we do even when it's harmful; "It's only when someone treats me this way - and it's totally acceptable in that situation." This applies not only to destructive external behavior, but especially destructive behavior within. From anxiety, to an impulse to lash out, disabuse, and control (both ourselves and others), these tendencies we often write off, accepting them as part of our days. Let's tell ourselves, "No longer, now is a time to care, now is a time for peace."

But why should we and how? Well, recentering on care and peace tends to be a key message of many major religions - from Swedenborgianism-Christianity to Buddhism - which highlight this processional transformation of consciousness as a major source of joy and transcendental peace. Our selfishness can seem to feel gratifying as we sit in its



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fantasy of domination and also in its temporary culminations in our deeds, but spiritual messengers and, I believe, life experience overwhelmingly reveal that these feelings of selfish gratification are hollow at best, and are often coupled with crippling fear, anger, defensiveness, sadness, and other unfortunate, natural, emotional partners.

Spiritualities of all stripes express in different ways a deep truth in relation to this: our selfish joys are relatively hellish in comparison to those that stem from more holistic, caring, uplifting, communal, and peaceful internal and external states.

In a sense, one could relate the idea that it is always a time to care and find peace to a type of walking meditation. On this meditative walk we still pay attention to the ground, our environment, the conversations we're having, but we allow peace to reign and we lean into our tendency to see things in a more interconnected, loving way. We continue to center ourselves on groundedness, on care and gratitude. On this meditative walk we allow for the occasional disruption - tripping over a stone, crossing a street, meeting a friend - but we become accustomed to the idea that this meditation is something we can employ in every moment, disrupting our typical, often destructive machination.

Further, it's ok to "disrupt" peace with joy and thanksgiving! These things are no disruptions at all - just the natural swell of our inborn impulse toward care and joy. All in all, leaning into our love of peace and connection can overcome some of our other impulses toward domination and fear if we allow it to. It's largely an intentional process to get started on this transformational orientation, but I think it's often like finding it's ok to take a vacation! What a burden, forcing yourself to relax and center ;)

Recently, we've been talking a bit about near-death experiences and how accounts of the spiritual realm seem to transform people's lives. It seems that for many people who have reportedly "gone over," there's a reorientation of their lives, or a heightened orientation, toward love, peace, kindness and fearlessness. Allowing ourselves to gravitate towards these transformations while acknowledging their broader source in our lives emboldens "the Universe," our highest power, Divinity, to continue to embolden us further in peace, strength, and gratitude no matter the "time" we find ourselves in, because there's only one time - a time for peace, the present moment.

Often, one practice recommended by sages of all stripes to accompany this meditative process is to reflect on our bodies. It can be a very helpful practice to reflect on the feelings and gravity in our physical body as well as our mental one (including our breathing and the sensation of our limbs), leaning into peace in both places, acknowledging that they are one and can find a gracious, caring attitude even in the gravest of moments. As our book discussion on *The Universe & I: Where Science & Spirituality Meet* has highlighted, each of our frame of references are models that we individually construct, and although we typically have to grapple with trauma and non-Divine examples in our lives, we have a Divine impulse toward overcoming and learning from those situations and influences and reframing our mindsets toward a higher view.

In the gospel stories of Jesus Christ, it becomes abundantly clear that this individual would disagree in all circumstances with the refrain, "It's a time to kill," made popular by

the book and movie of a similar name. It's interesting that despite this, even the most diehard followers of Christ's way would often rather kill than die or face deep poverty and enslavement. Indeed, we see nothing wrong with this mindset, even Emanuel Swedenborg seemed to believe that self-defense took precedent over literally emulating Jesus in this way, a person Swedenborg considered to be Jehovah / Sophia in the flesh. But I ask reverently and heartfully, does this sit well with us? Are we called to a higher peace and pacifism, literally turning the other cheek in the face of violence and persecution? I can't rule it out, although there's also an argument to be made for being culpable in allowing violence to continue, but is this a culpability that we'd also place at the feet of Divinity? Or does the necessity for spiritual freedom and subjectivity absolve Divinity and ourselves from putting a stop to violence violently and call us to something even more disruptive?

Moreover, whether it's peace and caring within or without, our journey toward it can be characterized by fits and starts, struggle and pain. It's easy for us to tell a story describing the why of our negative reactions and feelings, not reflecting on the deep possibility that it is our dispositions toward this negativity and destruction that are the true motives for their blooming, no matter the circumstance. Perhaps instead, we are called to a time to care, allowing Divinity and our higher power to transform our hearts toward a new modality, one truly deserving of all our time.



*Good, from Creation*

*October 21, 2018*

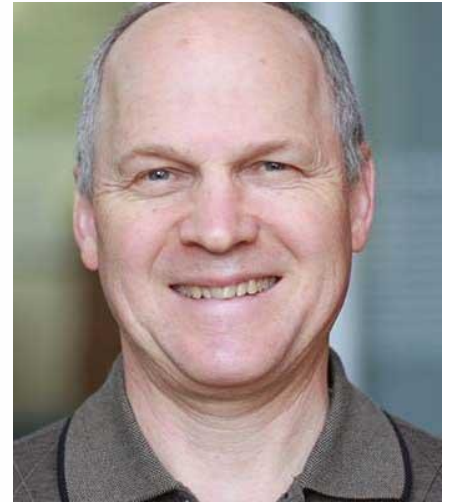
## **Good, from creation**

**by Rev. Grant Odhner**

At the end of the first chapter of the Lord's Word, we see this concluding sentence:

And God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. (Genesis 1:31).

We live in a beautiful world. It is a world made by God – by goodness itself! There are indeed some noxious things in the world – creatures, plants, soil conditions that are harmful and offensive, things that have sprung forth from the spiritual world through the twisted inspiration of hell. But these noxious things pale next to those that are good and useful. In fact, even the noxious things were brought forth in the context of the Lord's creation. As a result, they bear within them, in spite of themselves, the beauty of the Lord's order and wisdom (so much so that it is sometimes difficult to believe that a harmful creature or plant is really bad). Even evil things are compelled in many ways to contribute usefully to the ecology of the Lord's world. They too are compelled to serve His goodness.



How many of us believe that we are good? How many of us believe that from creation the Lord made us to be a form of His goodness? This is a more complicated question. Genesis chapter three, shortly after the creation story, tells us about the fall of Adam and Eve. We know that evil is a reality in the human mind. We know that our heredity nudges us toward selfishness and world-centeredness, the sources of evil. Yet it is important to think clearly about who we are in the Lord's sight. It's important to know just wherein evil lies, and wherein good lies. How else can we be truly free to choose and affirm the good and reject the evil?

The testimony of the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church is that we are created as multi-level beings. There are degrees or levels to our minds. This idea helps us think clearly. In general, our inner mind is created into the form of heaven. It is created to receive heaven and live in its sphere. Our outer mind is created into the form of the world. It is created to function here.

Swedenborg offers a good description of this in his work, *Arcana Coelestia*:

"[A human being's] inner self is formed according to the image of heaven, and the outer self according to the image of the world - insomuch that the inner self is a heaven in its smallest form, and the outer self is a world in its smallest form, thus is a microcosm.

That the outer self is an image of the world, may be seen from the ... bodily senses. For the ear is formed according to the whole nature of the modification of the air; the lungs according to the whole nature of the air pressure, as also is the general surface of the body, which is held in its form by the surrounding pressure of the air; the eye is formed according to the whole nature of ether and of light; [and so forth]. ... From all this it is evident that the whole of nature was brought together to conform to the outer part of a human being; and hence it is that the ancients called a human being a microcosm.

And just as the outer self has been formed according to the image of all things of the world, so has the inner self been formed according to the image of all things of heaven, that is, according to the image of the heavenly and spiritual things which proceed from the Lord and from which and in which is heaven. The heavenly things there are all those which are a matter of love to the Lord and of charity toward the neighbor; and the spiritual things there are all those of faith, which in themselves are so many and of such a nature that the tongue cannot possibly utter one millionth part of them. That the inner self has been formed according to the image of all these things, is strikingly shown in the angels. When they appear before the inner sight (as they have appeared before mine), by their mere presence they affect the most interior parts [of others]. For love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor pour out of them and penetrate, and the qualities of faith that result from love and charity shine forth from them and affect [others]. By this and other proofs it has been made plain to me that as the inner self has been created to be an angel, it is a heaven in its smallest form." (Arcana Coelestia 6057).

So our inner mind is a heavenly mind. From that mind we have a loving, well-meaning nature. From it we take delight in truth for its own sake and in being wise. This part of us is kept by the Lord in its integrity so that we might be human and become more and more so (Divine Love and Wisdom 270).

We cannot harm our inner self; we can only shut out its influence. The outer mind, by contrast is the seat of our troubles. Not because it is inherently bad, but because it can be twisted to act against our heavenly mind. This becomes clearer when we consider what loves drive these different levels of our mind.

Our inner mind consists of two basic loves: love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. (You'll recognize the Two Great Commandments here.) All good loves are related to these two basic ones.

Our outer mind consists of two basic loves: love of the world and love of self. All of these loves are good from creation. The natural loves were meant to serve the spiritual loves. When they do they are good loves. As we read in our third lesson, when rightly subordinated these loves all contribute to our perfection, but when not rightly subordinated, they pervert and invert us (True Christian Religion 403).

Earlier I asked "How many of us believe that we are good? How many of us believe that

from creation the Lord made us to be a form of His goodness?" If we are thinking from these teachings, we might say that we are indeed created forms of the Lord's goodness. The inner part of us is in the form of heaven, and the outer part of us is in the form of the world, which was created to serve heaven. What an important affirmation this is! Not only is this a beautiful world we live in, but we can be a beautiful part of it. We can actually love the world and love our self as well as love spiritual things. We can enjoy the world's pleasures without guilt. True Christian Religion elaborates a bit on what we mean by love of the world and love of self:

"The love of the world is not merely a love of wealth and possessions, but is also a love of all that the world affords, and of all that delights the bodily senses, as beauty delights the eye, harmony the ear, fragrance the nostrils, delicacies the tongue, softness the skin; it is also a love of fine clothes, convenient houses, and gathering with people, thus all the enjoyments arising from these and many other objects. The love of self is not merely the love of [personal] honor, glory, fame, and recognition, but also the love of meriting and seeking positions, and so of being in charge over others." (True Christian Religion 394).

It is OK to love these things. They are good and orderly provided they are controlled from above or within by heavenly loves.

The creation story symbolically describes the order we are discussing here. The Lord made the world and all things of it and gave them to the man whom He had created in His image and likeness. This man, symbolically, represents the inner part of us, the heavenly part. This is the part of us that is the Lord's aim in creating. This is the part of us from which we are human and in the Lord's image and likeness. It is to this part of us that the Lord gives everything else. He says to the heavenly part of us:

"Be fruitful and multiply; and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28).

The Lord wants our love for Him and for our neighbor to multiply and have dominion in our lives. He wants these things to become stronger and stronger in us. He wants these loves to control all of our lower loves. These lower loves are pictured by the animals in the creation story – the fish, birds, and land creatures. In fact, whenever an animal is mentioned in the Word it generally stands for some natural affection, passion, drive. For example, an ox stands for a natural affection for being of service (cf. Arcana Coelestia 2781 [4]; Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture 23). Our spiritual love for serving works by means of various natural drives, such as the simple drive to accomplish a task. This drive is natural because it works simply for the satisfaction of accomplishment, with little concern for the end in view. This drive is good but must be handled with care, just like an ox. We must not turn our back on it or let it run free. It must be tethered and yoked by a higher sense of service and discretion, otherwise our affection for accomplishing tasks can easily become a blind, misplaced loyalty or turn into a misguided, misdirected energy. Adam was told to subdue and have dominion



over these beasts. He was told to tend and keep them [*Editor's Note: Adam means "to be red" and "to make" in Hebrew, also has a close kinship to "earth" in Hebrew, which is Adamah -Google*]. He was also given to "name" them – which, symbolically, is to know and distinguish their different qualities (Apocalypse Explained 513.10; 650.19). We need to know and reflect on the different feelings, enjoyments, and drives in us, in order to be able to rightly guide them.

Earlier we acknowledged that it is difficult to think of ourselves as having been created as "very good" in the Lord's sight. We are painfully aware of how often we have strayed from loving the Lord and our neighbor. We are aware of how often we have indulged worldly pleasures without any regard for anything higher than our self. We know that there are times when we must deny ourselves things that are good, because we cannot handle them appropriately. We must take severe measures with ourselves, following the Lord's words:

"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." (Matthew 18:7-9). Yes, the things and pleasures of the world are good; they are a part of our life that we are intended to enjoy and use – like a hand or foot! But when we've abused them badly, we must shun the evil before we can enjoy them rightly. The answer is not, in the final analysis, to shun the world and its pleasures. The answer is not to renounce the love of self and the love of the world per se (although we often speak according to this appearance). The answer is to renounce the abuse of these loves, and to invite the Lord into our lives to restore the true order and its well-being.

As we begin a new fall, and get back to routines after summer interruptions, a new opportunity lies before us. Often we experience a new energy for recommitting ourselves to the Lord and to healthy patterns of living. May we take this opportunity and direct this new energy to strengthening our priorities, keeping in mind that our inner self dwells in the light and warmth of heaven. May we remember with optimism that...

"God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." (Genesis 1:31).

And finally may we remember the Lord's words:

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33).



*A Call to Heal: Our Personal Journey Toward Wholeness*

*October 27, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

### **2 Kings 5:9-14**

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

### **Luke 17:11-19**

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

## **A Call To Heal**

**by Rev. cory Bradford-watts**

So, it's my observation of sermons that sometimes it's nice to lead with a joke. It helps bring people together and break the tension. Comedy and jokes can help with healing as well - bridging gaps we may not even realize exist, helping us gain perspective and perhaps a deeper understanding...



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My grandfather, who's now a retired Baptist preacher, always tells these really corny jokes - and the same ones, over and over - as I'm sure you can relate. What's funny is that with all of our technological communication I really don't see or hear those types of corny jokes anymore, unless I'm with him (memes aren't the same!), so I thought I'd tell you one that you've absolutely heard before. It goes like this: A man gets checked out by his doctor, and she says, "I'm sorry but I have some good news and some bad news." The man responds, "Well let's get the bad news over with." The doctor says, "You have a fatal form of cancer." "Oh my God," the man exclaims, "and what's the good news!?" She puts her hand on his shoulder, "You have amnesia..." And how does the man respond? ...Exactly, "Well, at least I don't have cancer!"

What I find funny about this corny joke is that I think it fairly accurately describes our human condition most of the time. We may have pretty harmful diseases of the spirit, ones that stem from egotism, selfishness and materialism, or we may have issues that stem from trauma, but because we don't really acknowledge that they're actually there and daily impacting us, or we consider these maladies as part of ourselves - unable to be healed, we forget or overlook them entirely.

In today's reading, we have another example of Jesus healing the afflicted, something we see throughout the Gospel. For Emanuel Swedenborg these types of stories, indeed all the stories in scripture, speak to the inward process of healing that Goddess endeavors to work in us. And unlike the literal healing of our material plane, the healing that the internal sense of scripture describes involves becoming more loving and in better relationship with God and with our neighbors.

Indeed, we don't need Swedenborg to see that scripture describes internal healing in a myriad of ways. But according to him, this healing process of becoming more heavenly and loving is the process of salvation that the Lord enacts in all peoples: salvation is letting heaven rule our hearts and in particular, our intentions and actions. That is why Jesus, who Swedenborg believed to be the one personhood of Goddess made flesh, makes such an emphasis on actually doing what he commands. Jesus says in scripture, "Why say Lord, Lord, and not do what I've told you to do?" And yet, all too often, a faithful life is reduced to how we say God's name, how we describe her gender, or which religion we say we follow, instead of how we live our lives and what qualities reign in our hearts.

Thus, I believe that God continually works to undermine our selfishness and materialism, to spiritually heal us, humbling our hearts and calling us to higher loves. For Swedenborg, scripture's inner meaning speaks to this interfaith healing process of salvation, a process in which we accept the heavenly kin-dom within us, as Jesus asks us to do.

Now for some of us, this may be hard to swallow: What does it mean that scripture has an inner meaning? I concede that's a hard question. It's something that you'll probably only believe as you see it for yourself, as you experience and feel it. For me, after a lifetime of growing up in Protestant churches, it took Emanuel Swedenborg's

book *Apocalypse Revealed*, his spiritual explanation of the Biblical book of Revelation, before all the little scriptural dots in my head started to connect.

Even back in the 18th century, Swedenborg believed that the seven-day creation story, the one we've all probably heard, isn't a literal story, but that it represents the process of healing that the Divine tries to work in each of our spirits. We start off in spiritual darkness on the first day, perhaps incredibly selfish and materialistic, and we may act and believe as though nothing else really exists except our own desires and their fulfillment. In this darkness, the existence of God makes no sense to us, and we may believe that all religions are little more than manipulative social constructs, meant to soothe the idiot masses. And yet, nevertheless, as Genesis describes, the Spirit of God hovers over us whether we know it or not, and when the time is right Jehovah says, "Let there be light." And then, as the beginning of spiritual awareness lightens our personal abyss on the "first day," we start the process of inner healing - which hopefully, eventually gets us all the way to the seventh day, when we become truly human or humane, guided by peace and kindness, the Sabbath made manifest. This is God's gift of salvation, this is Goddess' hope: to make us a peaceful force in the world, within and without.

And boy do we need it, in a world as insane as ours has been and has become. Those of us with XY chromosomes and who identify as male especially, we only get a passing glimmer of some of our horrors in the movies today - pop culture hasn't become debased enough to envision a villain with tendencies as destructive as some of ours. Today, refugees made by Western actions are abused and hunger, but are turned away at Western borders, women's rights and voices are continually debased, Jewish centers of worship are attacked, the rights and protections of the defenseless and downtrodden are undermined, honest reporting is scourged and discredited, our leaders' are not held accountable to their actions - only their dismissive soundbites, and systematic atrocities against human beings and nature occur on a daily basis the world over in the name of selfishness. This includes the longstanding barbarism of America's bigoted and self-perpetuating prison state, the likes of which the world had never known before. We are each called to become a gift of peace and healing in this world, instead of another black hole of me-ism and materialism. Indeed, for Swedenborg, "Hell" is a state that we continually choose to receive and believe we desire, one that must be actively rejected with strength we receive from the Higher Power.

Moreover, once you're looking for it, you may find that scripture starts to reveal its inner, metaphorical dynamics to you. Often looking up the Hebrew meaning of a word immediately starts to break down the literal, narrow view that we had about a passage, and opens up our eyes to the depths of Hebrew and Biblical scripture. But scripture's self-revelation as a metaphor or parable that describes and inspires our personal spiritual journeys can be readily apparent without translation tools (although those tools are easily accessible through Google and otherwise - try looking at the Hebrew meanings for the words in Genesis 1:2 through [BibleHub.com](http://BibleHub.com)). Scripture relates wine and water to truth, as well as bread to goodness, it equates a bride to the church and marriage to our relationship with God, a sword to truth, fire to love: it uses an untold

number of literal depictions for deeper, heavenly things even in the English. Jesus refers to us when he describes the need to clean the inside of the cup, not just the outside of it. Christ was said to always speak in parable, so it should be no surprise to us if many scriptural stories, Biblical or otherwise, are parable instead of strict and often inapplicable literal tales. What may be surprising for us is the consistency in their esoteric messages.

However, for me, starting to relate to scripture as something other than empty text took quite a bit of inner journeying and change. I grew up in a pretty religious family, and as I said, my grandfather was a Baptist preacher and most of my family attended his services until he retired when I was 12. After that we attended a Salvation Army church with wonderful people. But almost as early as I can remember, I never believed a word anyone said about God.

My dad, the preacher's son, was always reading from other traditions as I grew up, literally lecturing me for hours about them, as well as taking my brother and I to various religion's events, particularly Muslim and Baha'i gatherings and prayers. He would even repeatedly emphasize that I should remember the name Emanuel Swedenborg! *But why would I want to remember that, Dad?* Haha. He would criticize his father's Protestant Christian tradition, highlighting its inconsistencies, like the belief in three persons in the Godhead, etc., and describe how his own interpretation of the Hindu Vedas or the Qur'an had it much more right, direfully so. Sometimes he would espouse conspiracy theories as well, like the one where the world is run by heinous reptilian aliens in the guise of our world leaders.

This inundation of intermixed, sometimes confusing religion and beliefs, and their lack of practical impact on how my father and others often treated people, instilled an aversion to religions and spirituality in me, and rather early on in life I decided that believing in God didn't make any sense. And hearing so much about love I also determined that I really didn't know what love was. So, when I was young and my dad would ask if I saw the magic in the world around me (believing that children were more able to discern the wonder of creation than adults) I would respond in the affirmative, but would always think, "No! I don't see any magic at all!" And I continually yearned for a sign from a God that I really didn't believe in.

Little did I know, I was essentially a leper calling to be healed.

It's interesting; we hear a lot of references to disease in scripture, especially leprosy. In fact, the book of Leviticus from the Hebrew Bible describes how a person who contracts it should not only head to a priest, but should repeatedly cry out "unclean, unclean," and tear their clothing and dishevel their hair.

I find this interesting, because it sounds similar to what many say is the first step in healing any of our own spiritual diseases and mental ones, our own destructive behaviors and selfish intentions: we must acknowledge that we have a problem. This doesn't necessarily mean that we should call out "unclean, unclean" and rip our threads.

But, in order to heal we must acknowledge our issues both to ourselves and to the Divine, and perhaps to others too for accountability and transparency, although this is often hard in a society set on punishment instead of rehabilitation. We also have to want to heal, which has often been something I've had to pray for, just the desire to heal. This approach applies to our spirit, as well as to society - our communal body. Unfortunately, sometimes parts of our leprosy can be more apparent to others than to ourselves in our defensiveness, and we may have difficulty admitting that we're in trouble.

In today's reading, however, we find ten individuals who for whatever reason aren't in denial and who don't seek to run from the truth of their ailment. They are crying out and have admitted their disease, even taking care to create a safe distance between their affliction and others. More so, they have turned to Jesus, to God, calling her "Master" in a display of humility. Indeed, for Swedenborg and for me, Jesus is the incarnation of the one personhood of the Holy, an embodiment of an all-encompassing, Divine humanity: the Divine Human One that gifts each of us with life - heat and light, love and wisdom - which is why he ends up shining like the sun. Humanity is something that we should strive to receive from God, from "the Universe." That's why I feel free to call God or Jesus "him" or "her."

Now calling someone a Master, as they do in our story, and becoming a spiritual servant to a dominating, selfish person, or any finite individual at all, is often quite an issue, but serving the rational love that is Goddess, that's a matter altogether different. Whether this is what the 10 people in our scripture thought, I'm not sure, we each have our own view of Divinity, but what we do know is that these 10 reach out to the personhood of Christ... and they immediately receive the command to show themselves to the priests in accord with scriptural dictate!

This seems kind of funny, doesn't it? Why didn't Jesus just heal them immediately as he's done so many times before? Strange, but perhaps we can find some healing in this comedy, in this twist on our expectations.

In Emanuel Swedenborg's opinion, even the term "priest" is something that scripture means for us to internalize in a way. Due to his spiritual visions and the way the term priest is used in Biblical scripture, Swedenborg believed that "priest" represents living according to higher truths. Now this doesn't mean that we shouldn't go to leaders or priests for diagnoses and spiritual treatments, but perhaps Jesus is asking these 10 to look toward their higher truths and to truly move towards them: to live according to them more and more, as ordained by scripture. And on this journey, they're all healed.

I know that the healing nature of this kind of journey has been true for me so far, but I have my ups and downs. Hopefully, we're all on a healing journey toward internal and external justice and health, although with its ups and downs, towards our own priests, towards our own priesthood, one continually vetted by our higher loves and a clear rationality. Hopefully, we can help our world be on this journey too. After calling out for God for so long, and ultimately rejecting a belief in her existence, I eventually found myself cracked open, the Lord eventually said, "Let there be Light." And so, as we all



continue to rediscover our call to heal and change on whichever day of creation we happen to be on today (from darkness to humaneness), let us hopefully strive to reject selfishness and materialism. Let us find ourselves starting to truly find that love, that magic, that always eluded us before, a type of joy and peace that we never thought could exist. And let us try to pass it forward.

Amen? Amen.



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*An Open Door*

*November 4, 2018*

## **READINGS**

### **From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

#### **Psalms 145:8-16** New International Version (NIV)

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you.

They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

#### **Revelation 3:7-8**

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, "These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

### **From Swedenborg**

#### **Heaven and Hell 533**

We can now see that it is not so hard to lead the life of heaven as people think, because it is simply a matter of recognizing, when something attractive comes up that we know is dishonest or unfair, that this is not to be done because it is against the divine commandments. If we get used to thinking like this, and from this familiarity form a habit, then we are gradually united to heaven. To the extent that we are united to heaven, the higher levels of our minds are opened, and to the extent that they are opened, we see what is dishonest and unfair; and to the extent that we see this, those qualities can be dispelled. For no evil can be banished until it has been seen.

**an open door**

**Rev. dr. george dole**



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These words seem particularly appropriate to this church, as it begins a new chapter in its history. For a decade or so, we have known pretty much what to expect from week to week.

That actually sounds rather like the church of our New Testament reading, the church in Philadelphia, commended for its "patient endurance." Of the seven churches to which John's letters were addressed, this is the only one with which no fault is found. Ephesus had left its first love. Smyrna was in poverty. Pergamum had some who followed false teachings. Thyatira tolerated a Jezebel. Sardis was just plain dead. Laodicea was even worse—lukewarm. Yet each one was given both counsel and a promise; and it is striking that the promise to Laodicea, which thought it was rich but was actually wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked, was given the highest promise imaginable: "To the one who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne" (Revelation 3:21). This is in perfect keeping with the divine policy that had just been explained: "I reprove and chasten those whom I love" (Revelation 3:19).



In contrast to all this, no change is required of Philadelphia. The only command given her is to hold fast what she has. She will be kept from the hour of trial that is coming everywhere else, and if she does, she will become a pillar in the temple.

A pillar? There is nothing exciting about a pillar, especially in comparison with sitting on the throne with the glorified Christ. But then, there is nothing very dramatic or lively about patient endurance. There is nothing very exciting or lively about the foundation of this building, either, but where would we be without it? All the sermons that have been preached here, all the prayers that have been offered, all the hymns that have been sung, all the psalms that have been chanted, all the offerings that have been made, have rested on that most inconspicuous solidity. In a sense, we pay the foundation one of the greatest compliments imaginable by taking it absolutely for granted. In trusting it, we are responding to its "patient endurance"; and we are not doing this because someone told us we should. We seem to be doing it under no compulsion whatever, inner or outer.

This is a challenging image for the church as a human institution. There are many subtle ways in which we do know pretty much what to expect of each other, and for that matter, of ourselves. It is intriguing, then, that the church in Philadelphia, the solid pillar with all its patient endurance, finds itself facing an open door, with no hint of what lies beyond it. She is being told, apparently, that she does not need to know what lies beyond that door except that it will not be overwhelming. She needs only to maintain her patient endurance, because that will prevent her from pushing any panic buttons. It will enable her to respond thoughtfully to whatever happens.

If this is the case, it must be because what she has come to trust is truly trustworthy. It cannot be shallow or superficial. There are kinds of conservatism that are simply inflexible, that insist on doing particular things in prescribed ways, saying particular words, wearing particular clothes, eating particular foods, and the like. It takes only a very little reflection to see how vulnerable this is to anyone with a gift for mimicry. Con artists are experts at putting on whatever outward appearance they wish, and there is pretty big money to be made by this kind of evangelism.

That kind of conservatism is very much like the hard outer shell of a lobster, both hiding and protecting an inner fragility. The language of correspondence spoke loud and clear in the nineteenth century when the most resolutely conservative wing of the Baptist church became known as "hard shell Baptists." The label seems to have been self-explanatory.

The Lord addressed this problem with a different image. "No one puts new wine into old wineskins" (Matthew 7:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37.). The old wineskin would be brittle, incapable of expanding to accommodate the still-lively new wine. External rigidity cannot handle internal growth. Lobsters handle this by shedding their shells completely. Human beings handle it by having skins that can stretch.

All the while, of course, the human body maintains its shape and coherence because of its inner "foundation," its bones, its skeletal structure. This does change over the years, but once we pass adolescence, the change is so gradual as to be negligible. We can influence the outer shape of our bodies by exercise and diet, but all we can do about our bones is provide them with the nutrients they need to go on doing their own thing.

Let us then try thinking of this church as being faced with an open door, one that we cannot shut. Let us think of it as enjoined to be patient, to be constant, to hold fast to what we have. What can we hold fast to that will allow for growth that will not be a hard shell or a brittle wineskin, destined eventually to burst and be discarded? The lawyer's question to Jesus comes to mind: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer, in this instance drawn from the lawyer himself rather than given to him by Jesus, was the two great commandments. (Luke 10:25-28).

In a way, that answer is embedded in the question, because the lawyer was looking for the key to eternal life, and essentially, life is love. The first characteristic of love that Paul names in that wondrous thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is patience, using a Greek word that we might render as "long-tempered" (1 Corinthians 13:4); and he goes on to say that it never fails (verse 8). To strive for eternal life is then to strive to be precisely what love is—long-lasting, never failing, patient, enduring. If what you have is love, then by all means, "Hold fast to what you have."

Here we arrive at a kind of paradox, because love is essentially active, and activity is a form of change. When we put this combination of constancy and change together rightly, the product is growth; and the proper theological term for the kind of growth to which this church is devoted is "regeneration."

We see this as a lifelong process. Each of us can look at photos of ourselves as children and see two seemingly irreconcilable things—how much we have changed, and how inescapably we are that same individual. My story is my story, your story is your story. But then, our stories overlap and interweave. They find their meaning in their interrelationships; and those interrelationships depend on the maintenance of our distinct identities, of our integrity as individuals.

This constant tension between our need for individuality and our need for relationships can tax our wisdom to its limits. As one psychologist has observed, in raising children, parents must need to hold them when they need to be held, let go of them when they need to get free, and be there for them to come back to when time comes. A good many sleepless nights have been spent trying to decide whether to hold or to let go. The goal is the ultimate regeneration of the child, which is very closely bound up with the regeneration of the parents. If their primary concern is their own convenience, they can do some very real damage.

The goal of parenting is closely akin to the goal of the church. Its collective spiritual health is inseparable from its spiritual growth, and this in turn depends on the regeneration of its members. If they are growing in mutual understanding and affection, if they are discovering the unique God-given gifts both of themselves and of others, then the church is truly alive. If this is not happening, then in effect the church is in need of healing, perhaps even on life support. I recall someone once saying that their church had a large enough endowment that it could keep going even if it didn't have any members, which is a pretty dramatic example of losing touch with what "church" is all about.

To this central goal of regeneration, then, we must hold fast with all the patient endurance of which we are capable. Each one of us in is process, is changing. Actually, everything is in process, is changing. Like it or not, right now we are all driving antique cars—the antique cars of the future.

The choices we face are never really between change and non-change, but between change for the better and change for the worse; and it can be hard to tell the difference. There is no simple "one size fits all." We are not a gathering of stereotypes living in a community of stereotypes, all following predetermined programs. When our theology speaks of influx, as it so often does, it is talking about flow, including the constant flow of thoughts and affections in our own minds and hearts.

"Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." For all we know, this may be happening every day; but right now it is calling for attention. We know that we are standing at the beginning of a new chapter in the story of this church, and rather abruptly, we do not know quite what to expect. We should certainly hope that there will be something new for us on the other side of that door, which means something unfamiliar and to some extent unexpected. At every point, under the Lord's providence, this newness will offer opportunities for learning, for deepening understanding of what it is about this beloved church that makes it worthwhile. May we be diligent in our efforts to look at what we now have, to distinguish clearly that to which we must hold fast, and may our hearts and minds be as open as that door.

Amen.



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*Divine Justice: God's Liberation Theology for Us, the Poor*

*November 11, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

### **Isaiah 25 (ESV)**

1 O Lord, you are my God;

I will exalt you; I will praise your name,  
for you have done wonderful things,  
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

2 For you have made the city a heap,

the fortified city a ruin;  
the foreigners' palace is a city no more;  
it will never be rebuilt.

3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;

cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

4 For you have been a stronghold to the poor,

a stronghold to the needy in his distress,  
a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat;  
for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,

5 like heat in a dry place.

You subdue the noise of the foreigners;

as heat by the shade of a cloud,  
so the song of the ruthless is put down.

6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,  
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

7 And he will swallow up on this mountain

the covering that is cast over all peoples,  
the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death forever;

and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces,





and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.

9 It will be said on that day,

“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.

This is the Lord; we have waited for him;

let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

10 For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain,

and Moab shall be trampled down in his place,

as straw is trampled down in a dunghill.<sup>[a]</sup>

11 And he will spread out his hands in the midst of it

as a swimmer spreads his hands out to swim,

but the Lord will lay low his pompous pride together with the skill<sup>[b]</sup> of his hands.

12 And the high fortifications of his walls he will bring down,

lay low, and cast to the ground, to the dust.

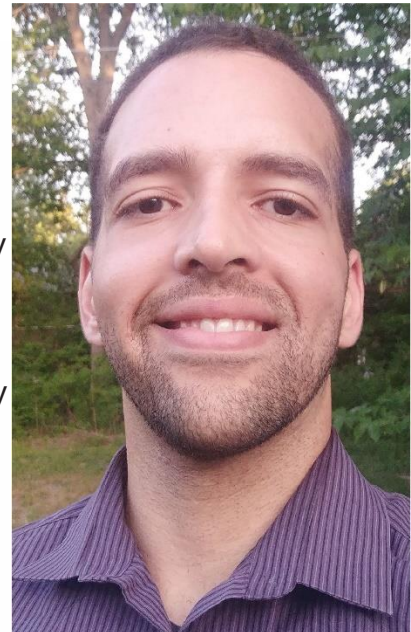
## **Divine Justice: God's Liberation Theology for Us, the Poor**

**By Cory Bradford-Watts**

Christ in scripture doesn't mince words when he describes the blessedness of the poor and downtrodden, remarking that theirs is the Kin-dom of Heaven. Along that vein, God remarks something like, "It is harder for a rich person to enter the Kin-dom of Heaven than for a camel to fit through an eye of a needle." Are we to take these remarks seriously in scripture? If so, what does it mean to be rich or poor? Should we take this idea literally?

As you may suspect, even if we are to take this idea literally it won't be as straightforward as it sounds. What is "rich" in a literal sense? Many even in the U.S.'s upper middle class will swear they aren't rich at all - always striving against the downward current of their ego, perhaps? Maybe. It is not a fiction that much of our world operates from a scarcity mindset and the promotion of scarcity and consumption, where ruin truly is around the corner for even those considered wealthy.

Indeed, the poor state of our economic and idealistic structures are quite burdensome on all of us. And since the system itself and those of us who are "rich" generally refuse



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to see ourselves as structurally and spiritually "poor" as we are, we all continue to suffer. If all we have are really gifts from the Goddess and each other then we should all view ourselves as poor, willing to share and uplift others in mass humility.

There is an analog to this in our spiritual lives as well. We often operate from a selfish, prideful, dominating mindset that continues to lead us and the poor souls impacted by us to pain and unpleasantness, anxiousness, scarcity, and ruin. This is because we often operate from a personal system of scarcity, feeling and intrinsically believing that if we cannot assert ourselves, our will, ultimately our disfunction, in any given moment we will spiritually and emotionally starve and we feel that all is wrong and unfortunate in the world.

This selfish perspective and our unwillingness to truly lean into positive change with the insight gained from scripture, sages, our higher self, and wise leaders allow the system around us to continue to embody this as well. If only we knew a glimmer of what it is truly like for the materially and situationally poor in this world, and if only we came to accept the true richness and glory of accepting Divinity's gifts for all of us - gifts of bounty, gifts of sharing, of peace, intrinsic worth, of emotional, psychological, and spiritual health - we would reject this system entirely for something more organic, something more "social" (dare I say?) and whole. These gifts are infinite and already abound, scripture tells us. It tells us we should pass them on and continue to share them as all of our rights, rejecting the selfish, scarcity viewpoints and structures that allow our material coffers to abound in both material riches and death.

Moreover, Emanuel Swedenborg believed that the poor in scripture sometimes means those who accept that they are actually spiritually (and materially) poor, even though they may have much. They accept this because they acknowledge that everything they have that is worthwhile is from the Holy One, and that they are called to pass those gifts on, giving as if they were the Holy One themselves. This is what it means to be poor and to feed the poor, to visit the orphan and the widow, to uplift the downtrodden while being downtrodden. We should acknowledge anything that we have is not our own and is not from ourselves, and while we sustain ourselves we each should pass these things on as offerings, as all Divine gifts should be. In this modality, we will find infinite bountifulness and, like knowledge, we'll also find that all our other gifts are as inexhaustible and as holy from the Lord if we treat them and use them as such.

"But what about the truly poor," you say? Yes! What about them? Everything, it's all about them. How can we not strive to transform our internal and external structural evil when it leads to the atrocities and pain around is?

Imagine a glimmer of the horror of being locked in a basement, locked into dead end unending jobs with our children and relationships being neglected, being trapped in foster homes with abuse beyond imagining, in concentration camps in the mines of North Korea, in concentration camps in the prisons of the U.S. and in the fining factories of our poor towns' city halls, in a hole of our society's making with overseers who blame you for the torture you can't escape and that they unknowingly and gleefully endorse



and further - that we unknowingly and contentedly endorse and further. Know not no longer. Lord help us know not no longer.

The Lord helped us know not no longer, but we often ignore his sage advice. (continued below)

But before we get to that, let us reflect on some of the other God-centered wisdom that has come after Christ's resurrection. There's been a movement within certain Christian theological circles and practices dubbed "Liberation Theology," largely initiated by Latin American theologians and Catholics. In this framework Christians are called to follow in God's footsteps in her focus and love for the literally ostracized, poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

It can't be overstated the importance of such thinking and striving. Think of the oppressed around you: the minorities, women, and men, the children and animals, nature and spirit, our own propensities for love and healthy creativity. But especially those human beings trapped in oppressive situations outside of their control, crying for help and support. These people often become refugees, they become victims and victimizers, and if you are in a privileged country, often part of their oppression comes at your benefit. And yet we turn away. The "Christians" among and within us especially deem it Christian to turn away.

We fail to realize that to the extent there is oppression around us there is probably oppression within us, and we all suffer. Christians and others must start to take seriously the idea that in the face of the overlooked is the face of Divinity, as Goddess warns us that she considers our treatment of these as our treatment of her. Does this mean we should give everything we have away and follow her? Christ sure seems to think so. My request of you is similar: recognize that what you have is not your own, give what you can away as you receive it, and work to transform the system that says otherwise.

Jesus says,

#### [Matthew 25:34-36](#)

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

#### [Luke 4:16-19](#)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good

news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

#### [Luke 6:20-21](#)

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.'

#### [Mark 10:21-22](#)

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

#### [Mark 12:41-44](#)

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

#### [Luke 14:12-14](#)

He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

#### [Luke 16:19-25](#)

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

#### [Luke 11:39-42](#)

Then the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God.'

#### [Luke 12:16-21](#)

Then he told them a parable: 'The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he

said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.'

#### Proverbs 19:17

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.

#### Deuteronomy 15:11

For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'

#### Proverbs 14:31

Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

#### Proverbs 22:9

Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.

#### Proverbs 28:27

Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.

#### Proverbs 21:13

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

#### Proverbs 29:7

A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge.

#### 1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

#### Proverbs 14:21

Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.

#### Proverbs 22:22-23

Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.

#### Proverbs 17:5

Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

#### Proverbs 31:8-9

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

#### Psalms 140:12

I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy.

#### Deuteronomy 15:7-8

“If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

#### Proverbs 22:16

Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.

Need she go on?



*A Newer Church*

*November 18, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

### **Isaiah 42:5-12, New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> This is what God the Lord says—  
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,  
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,  
who gives breath to its people,  
and life to those who walk on it:  
<sup>6</sup> “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
<sup>7</sup> to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.  
  
<sup>8</sup> “I am the Lord; that is my name!  
I will not yield my glory to another  
or my praise to idols.  
<sup>9</sup> See, the former things have taken place,  
and new things I declare;  
before they spring into being  
I announce them to you.”

### **Song of Praise to the Lord**

<sup>10</sup> Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise from the ends of the earth,  
you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it,  
you islands, and all who live in them.  
<sup>11</sup> Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices;  
let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice.  
Let the people of Sela sing for joy;  
let them shout from the mountaintops.  
<sup>12</sup> Let them give glory to the Lord  
and proclaim his praise in the islands.



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## **Revelation 21:9-27**

<sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. <sup>14</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. <sup>16</sup> The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia<sup>[a]</sup> in length, and as wide and high as it is long. <sup>17</sup> The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits<sup>[b]</sup> thick.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>18</sup> The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>21</sup> The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

<sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

### **From Swedenborg**

#### ***Revelation Unveiled 879***

“And I, John, saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” means a new church to be established by the Lord at the close of the former one, a church that will be allied with the new heaven in divine truths in regard to its theology and in regard to its life.

The reason John names himself here by saying, “I, John,” is that he as an apostle means the good that love for the Lord does and therefore the good that we live. That is why he was more beloved than the other apostles and lay on the Lord’s breast at the Supper (see John 13:23; 21:20). This holds true also for the church that is being described here.

## A Newer Church

By REV. Dr. GEORGE DOLE

This service was given in the Church of the New Jerusalem, a Swedenborgian church, in Bath, Maine on 6/3/12

*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great, high mountain and shows me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; and its light was like a most precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal.*

Revelation 21:10-11

Almost two and a quarter centuries ago—in April 1789, to be exact—a group of devoted readers of Swedenborg gathered in London "to consider the most effectual means of promoting the establishment of the New Church, distinct from the Old." The invitation to this gathering listed forty-six theological propositions to be discussed as the basis of this action; and it was addressed to "all the readers of the theological works of EMANUEL SWEDENBORG, who are desirous of rejecting, and separating themselves from, the Old Church, or the present Established Churches, . . . and of fully embracing the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church . . ." [Bellin, Harvey F. and Ruhl, Darrell, eds. *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition is True Friendship* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985), p. 122.]



According to *Secrets of Heaven* 8152, "When life makes the church, and not doctrine separated from life, the church is one; but when doctrine makes the church, there are many." With the hindsight of a couple of centuries, it is not hard to see that the intent to separate effectively blotted out any dream of the church being or becoming one; and the phrase "desirous of rejecting" stands out with painful clarity. What we have in common, apparently, is what we don't believe.

In fact, there were equally devoted readers who protested against this "separatist" action, a principal one being none other than John Clowes, whose devotion led him to translate the entire *Arcana Coelestia* into English. Ever since that time, a thorough study of the impact of Swedenborgian theology needs to follow two streams—that of "card-carrying Swedenborgians," members of our institutional churches, and that of such "non-card-carrying" readers as Blake, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Goethe, Jung, and Emerson, among many others.

We must wonder what that organizational meeting might have brought forth if it had been focused on uniting kindred spirits rather than on setting them apart. In the same spirit, and again with a couple of centuries of hindsight, we must also wonder at the fact that this effort to found "the New Church" paid virtually no attention to the only description of the new church that there is in the "heavenly doctrines"

themselves—the presentation of the deeper meaning of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, in *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

There is a reason for this. Understandably, the initial steps toward establishing an institutional body focused on matters of order and organization, and the description of the new church in *Revelation Unveiled* is no help whatever in this regard. The image comes to mind of trying to design an automobile and being given a very insightful description of the basic principles of good driving. This is obviously relevant to the design of the automobile, but it does leave a lot to the engineers.

To pursue that image a little further, the earliest automobiles were basically carriages, with engines taking the place of horses; and the order and organization of the New Jerusalem church looked very much like the order and organization of the "Old Church," with churches that looked like churches, services on Sundays, clergy and laity, committees for this and that—we were certainly open to the charge that we were putting new wine into old bottles.

This worked fairly well for about a century, but at least in the industrialized countries, things then started to slow down. In the nineteen thirties, this church here in Bath nearly went out of existence; but it turned out that there was some life left in the new wine after all, and it revived.

We find ourselves in a transition phase here and now. Tennyson said it well: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." He added, "And God fulfills himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world." [From *The Passing of Arthur*, line 408.] "Good customs," customs that fit their times, can outlive their usefulness; and when they do, it is clearly time to focus on their usefulness.

This is a somewhat roundabout way of calling us to take a fresh look at the ideal of "a new church" as presented in *Revelation Unveiled*, and to do this initially in the spirit of basic research rather than of product development, so to speak. The obvious first step in this process is to take a fresh look at the introduction to the vision of the holy city, hence this morning's text:

*And he carried me away in the spirit to a great, high mountain and shows me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God; and its light was like a most precious stone, like jasper, clear as crystal.*

John's being taken to a great, high mountain, *Revelation Unveiled* says, means that he was taken to the highest heaven (§896). This is the heaven permeated by a love of oneness; and the closest we can come to this is to recall times when we were overcome with the inexpressible dearness of some individual, some individuals, our country, our church, our world. I hear astronaut Edgar Mitchell saying, "On the return trip home, gazing through 240,000 miles of

*space toward the stars and the planet from which I had come, I suddenly experienced the universe as intelligent, loving, harmonious."*

What John saw, then, was unearthly, and the Christian church has long recognized that his vision cannot be taken as a prophecy of something that will happen in this material world. One classic evangelical commentary puts it very simply: " The idea of a city literally descending from heaven, and being set upon the earth with such proportions—three hundred and seventy miles high, made of gold, and with single pearls for gates, and single gems for the foundations—is absurd." [Albert Barnes et al., *Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments* (26 vols.) [4 publishers](#), 1847–1885] When we turn then to *Revelation Unveiled* we find the following:

The "great city, the holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" means the Lord's new church . . . . The reason it was seen in the form of a city is that a city means a theological system; and a church is a church because of its theology and because of a life in accord with its theology. It was also seen as a city so that its whole nature could be described, and it is described by reference to its wall, gates, foundations, and different dimensions.

To translate this into somewhat simpler terms, the image of a city is an image of a way of living together. There are a great many different ways of living together—different cultures, different forms of government, associations for different purposes—there seems to be no "one size that fits all." Think for a moment of the eight members of the crew of a racing shell. They need to act as subjects of an absolute tyrant, the coxswain, if they are to have any chance of success. This is all very well when the task is as simple as propelling a boat, but when it comes to a group like a family, that kind of organization is a recipe for disaster.

No, a city needs to include all the functions of living together, and for it to function harmoniously, there needs to be a willing agreement as to fundamental values, of principles. In the view from the mountain top of the highest heaven, the supreme value is described as a "love of the Lord," a phrase which does not really define itself.

For clarity in this regard, we may turn to *Heaven and Hell* (§399):

We may gather the magnitude of heaven's pleasure simply from the fact that for everyone there it is delightful to share their pleasure and bliss with someone else; and since everyone in the heavens is like this, we can see how immense heaven's pleasure is. . . .

This kind of sharing flows from the two loves of heaven . . . love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. These loves by nature want to share their pleasures. The reason love for the Lord is like this is that the Lord's own love is a love of sharing everything it has with everyone—it intends the happiness of everyone. Much the same love exists in individuals who love him, because the Lord is in them.

In the new church, then, I am treasured in a way that awakens the best within me. It feels wonderful, and I cannot help but want to share that feeling. It overflows. It overflows, and it is contagious. We are all capable of it, because it is the quality of the life that is constantly flowing into us from the Lord. It has quite an obstacle course to run before its effects reach the level of our everyday consciousness, but we get glimmers of it from time to time. We are familiar enough with it to have a sense of how real and how beautiful it can be, how near it is and yet often how far.

We do not seem to be able to summon it at will, but we can perhaps invite it, or at least recognize and reject some of the obstacles that impede it—our desires to have others recognize how important we are, to hear only what we want to hear, to enlarge ourselves by demeaning others.

We can also look for signs of it in others by giving them the fullest and most empathetic attention we can muster. We can recognize that we cannot answer the question "What would Jesus do?" until we have answered the question "What would Jesus see?" What would happen if we made a habit of imagining that loving presence standing next to us as we engage in conversation? After all, as our third reading reminds us, the apostle "John," who saw the holy city descending, stands for "the good that love for the Lord does and therefore the good that we live."

All this may stand as a very sketchy introduction to "a fresh look at the ideal of a 'new church' as presented in *Revelation Unveiled*." Sketchy as it is, though, we could do worse than let that phrase, "the good that love for the Lord does and therefore the good that we live" find a place in our minds to take root and bear fruit.

Amen.



*Hope, Even in Darkness*

*December 2, 2018*

**READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

**John 17:22-26, 7:37-39 (English Standard Version)**

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father/Mother, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Parent, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of their heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**Isaiah 64:6**

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

**Hope, Even in darkness**

**Week 1 of Advent**

**By REV. cory Bradford-Watts**

Sometimes the places you find hope are not where you expect it. Take the short talk from President Trump above for example: for me, it’s one of the only beams of light and clarity from this gentleman, and his renewed emphasis on these ideas (as well as his forthcoming gun bump stock ban) a few days ago in late November are the first glimmers of hope in a long while from him, and brings me some optimism for some systemic transformation, albeit a very small glimmer. This can often be true amidst darkness no matter our politics: hope can find us unexpectedly and blessedly, although it’s easy and rational to dispel or dismiss it due to its surroundings or source.

In my opinion, this doesn’t mean that Trump is dispelling his darkness of action and sentiment (far from it, just as we often do not even when we make a coherent set of decisions), but that there might be a shared point of motivation and dialogue between he and progressives for both his transformation and for ours as a country. Moreover, I

deeply agree with his attitude toward the state of mental health efforts in this country and his call for renewed investment and emphasis. In fact, I think that our lack of this type of help and rehabilitation is what leads to and perpetuates our horrendous prison state (our prisons are extremely anti-rehab for many), as well as perpetuate criminality and our propensity to create and elect leaders like Donald Trump in the first place. Can you find a similarly unexpected glimmer of hope in your own darkness? Are you willing to lean into that light and warmth, or do you dismiss the whole enterprise as a waste of time? Can we each be an unexpected source of hope for others, an advent of Jesus Christ Sophia's love in their lives? Of course we can.

As Barack Obama stated,

Hope is not blind optimism. It's not ignoring the enormity of the task ahead or the roadblocks that stand in our path. It's not sitting on the sidelines or shirking from a fight. Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it. Hope is the belief that destiny will not be written for us, but by us, by the men and women who are not content to settle for the world as it is, who have the courage to remake the world as it should be.

The Divine One empowers the ability and strength for this type of remaking, both in our spirits and around us. We are powerful beings, as Lana Del Rey says in our opening song. We are powerful thanks to our unity and reception of life – the structures, energy, and propensities gifted to us through evolution, connection, and community by the Infinitely Good One, Life Itself.

There's no need to believe in the Judeo-Christian God to believe in life, right? Life is within us, around us, it permeates this earth abundantly – of which we can all agree no matter how rare or randomly (albeit, miraculously) we believe it got here. I'm sure we'll find it permeates the universe in ways and in richness beyond our imagination, and not just in the profound wellspring of beauty, connection and complexity that describes matter and the stars and planets.

Alyssa, my partner, and I are sharing the great pleasure of listening to Michelle Obama's new book, *Becoming* ([Google Play](#), [Amazon](#)). Her heartfelt account of her life in her own voice in that audiobook speaks deeply to us. For me, it serves as one source of renewed hope in U.S. society and in people's hearts, but also as an inspirational description of Divine Providence, particularly as she relays the seemingly miraculous and expedient circumstances that led to her husband's political rise.

Moreover, her account of her own pitfalls, processing, and growth serve as an inspiration for me to remember that transformative insight and change is just around the corner for all of us: personally, politically, and communally, although it often takes real dedication and work. We just have to have our hearts open to the hopeful process as it reveals itself to us, and we should be open to the Divine strength that enables it and uplifts it. Sometimes this may involve having

hope in ourselves and in our relationships, seeking health, council, and wisdom for situations that may seem scary or overwhelming, those that jeopardize relationships we hold so dear with others, ourselves, and with higher qualities that we hope to aspire to. For this reason, we should each be open to feedback, self-reflection, therapy, learning, meditation, and other healthy self-care and spiritual practices. Maybe it's adding the right words to your home's walls, daily calendar reminders, a call or two to finally book that counselor, or reaching out to me or a trusted friend or advisor.

Even President Trump brings me hope in a way. The light he sheds on the distortions in this country, both politically and internally, may serve for future, directed change. His call for better mental health systems is indeed a call and hope for his bettered mental health, as well as each of ours. His shocking recent stance on gun control is another type of call for rational health. He galvanizes people toward activism as well, even if through anger at him, which may be the greatest source of hope from him of all.

We've also learned quite a bit about the mechanisms of presidency and government we knew little about before, as his every misstep creates a shadow of the shape of government he's abused and our current inability to do much about it (this is my opinion, share yours in the comments!). Do you agree? What other hopes can we find in society's darkness today? Although our interests and politics may not align, we should each strive to continue to inspire the positive motives that may be within our opinions and insights – even the political – and to take hope that many of us seem to care. Do you find it hard to take hope in the heart of someone with an opinion so diametrically opposed to your own? What's the source of that, if I may ask? What are three other sources of that?

It's not a fault of character to look for hope and light in others, even if we feel they are acting out of deep darkness. It gives us two apparently opposing points of reference, shining light for us on their spirit as we continue to perceive them better, and giving us leverage to embolden more positive change in them and ourselves. Because, although our other opening song mentions we are perfect just the way we are, and yes, we are each incredibly beautiful, many of our destructive habits aren't perfect, and we always have room to grow. Growth is a noble calling for each of us, a ministry for ourselves and for others, a sentiment that many agree with if the popularity of inspirational social media posts and the sharing of self-care promotion is any indication. These ministries see the positive in others and promote it, their uplifting words accept our abilities to perceive, to change, and to want to change, and leverage these for communal improvement and, really, all of our joy. Our society has entered a new age of personally promoting the Divine glimmers in ourselves and in others, although our motives for doing so are sometimes deeply selfish and egotistic. Thus, we are called to promote the Divine glimmers in our motivations as well, rejecting the hellish from occurring and reoccurring.

As we walk throughout the world it is all too easy to be pessimistic about the people that we interact with and pass by, but it can be a powerfully healing enterprise for our spirit to see the

truly advent presence of life, beauty and divinity in others. Indeed, we should strive to feel this. It brings us hope! This lightens our soul from the burden of pessimism and disassociation, and yes, can be directed toward the most heinous of actors, just not their troubled acts or apparent motivations in them. This is for our own healing and to increase our own Divine insight, as well as to help empower us to act for positive change and interact with the goal of leaning into the Higher Power's presence. Don't get me wrong though, sometimes the best course of action is to create distance between us and the destructive individuals in our lives. This can be vital and very hard; it's allowing the spiritual distance that we feel toward someone to manifest for our own health, as well as possibly theirs. But sometimes this can become our habit – distancing ourselves – which may say more about ourselves and our need for reflection and change than about others.

The 18th-century scientist-turned-mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, says that the advent of Christ was this type of hope in the darkness made manifest and active. Although we may disagree with the particulars of his opinion and visions, it's interesting to hear that to him the time of Christ's birth was reportedly the most spiritually dark time in the history of our earth's humankind. For Swedenborg, the advent of Christ was the long-prophesied, imaged, and imagined incarnation of Jehovah Sophia God in the flesh. The process of overcoming all temptation that Christ underwent until his "glorification" (a Biblical term) was a vital process of righting the heavens, hells, and our relationships with them and the Divine, helping us even in our most selfish, destructive states. According to the Swede, this allows the Spirit to dynamically reach us even in our darkest, most evil and materialistic hours if we finally allow her in, since God herself has a deep intimate knowledge about entering and overcoming those hours. What do you think of this description of the Lord's advent and life? One of a deeply human advent, seeking to reconnect and embolden. #AdventEqualsSelfcare?

For me, this is a source of deep hope and empowerment for my own healing and inspiration to heal. It inspires a leaning into and acceptance of the "salvation" process, the process of becoming more heavenly, peaceful and joyful – rejecting what were once my personal hells, within and without. It's hope made and making manifest! Jehovah brings the strength to embody those hopes, no matter the historical accuracies or lack thereof in our traditions – she emboldens us in our beliefs to advent Divinity more and more in our practice of those traditions, in others, and in ourselves.

Amen? What are your thoughts on this? Bless us with the hope of your insight in the comments below.

*Peace Be With, In & Through You*

*December 8, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

### **Isaiah 9:6**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

### **John 14:27**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

### **John 16:33**

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

### **Matthew 5:9**

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

**From Swedenborg**

### **Summary of *Heaven & Hell* section: The State of Peace in Heaven (284-290)**

- Heaven's peace is transcendental, and cannot be accepted while we are in our bodies, although there is a peace of mind with people who are content in God
- With innocence, peace is the other thing at the heart of heaven and that comes directly from Goddess
- Peace is the heart of the delight that comes from innocence, from goodness
- The oneness in the Lord between her divine nature and divine humanity gives rise to peace, and shows up in heaven through God's union with the angels. Peace is the blessedness of heaven and source of all joy there
- This is why in scripture the Lady is called the Prince of Peace and the source of peace, and angels are called angels of peace and heaven the dwelling place of peace
- The sabbath is also a holy symbol because it reminds us of quietness and peace and symbolizes the peace that comes from our union with Goddess
- Of course, peace varies with our reception of God's hope of union with us
- This union, the union of good and truth within us, happens primarily after trials by temptation, and then we come into a state of delight from heavenly peace
- For people who love evil, there is no peace, although they may present outward calm, tranquility or pleasure



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# Peace Be With, In & Through You

Week 2 of Advent

By REV. cory Bradford-Watts

Last week we talked about our process of becoming more heavenly, more hopeful, by allowing Divinity to work in our spirits to heal and reform our hearts, intentions, and actions. The mystical theologian Emanuel Swedenborg tells us that the purpose of this work within us is for our own peace and joy, that the Higher Power is not seeking worshippers for her sake, but for ours, as worship (in all its infinite forms) helps promote these things. Worship and acknowledgment of the Holy One as the Only True One helps us to not only improve our perception of the universe, but to shed our ego from our goodness, our selfishness from our innocence, and the idea that the source of our gifts is finite - that the gifts themselves (from strength to food) have to be finite and scarce - which helps us accept and offer up more of them.

According to Biblical scripture and Swedenborg, shedding these self-oriented propensities and becoming a blessing brings a deep peace to our spirits and minds. God is peace itself and always present deep within us and around us, working to become more and more embodied within, through, and for us. Entering the peace of heaven is a real metaphysical phenomenon according to Swedenborg, but it involves us accepting heavenly qualities and intentions - no matter our tradition.

As the Jesus of Biblical scripture states, "Why say, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I've told you to do?" And he says he will dismiss those who do call him so, but don't actually "know" him. Some of us tend to be of the opinion that being entrenched, learned, or labeled in the correct religion or truths are what it takes to "enter Heaven," often condemning others who are not so lucky to hellfire. But Christ seems to characterize his advent in our lives as something transcending surface knowledge and specific awareness of his historic presence, instead, characterizing the children of God as "the peacemakers," among [other things](#).

Goddess clearly manifested in order to lead by example and to uplift healthy living and relating. Who'da thought? The Lord did all the things we say a good leader should, even emphasizing healthy practices over hero worship - unless we acknowledge that that hero is Divine, with a transcendent "name," and that worship of her consists of living more and more divinely humane lives.

We see a similar advent and message around the source of life in many traditions, from Hinduism (where the manifestations of God are often interpreted to represent all of her qualities and "personalities" - of which we receive) to Islam, both of which strive to humble our spirits and whose scriptures repeatedly motivate us to do good and find peace, emphasizing these as necessary for us to advance spiritually and to find joy. The Qur'an calls all the believers in one Divinity by shared monikers in its earliest surahs (sections) - from Christians to Jews and beyond, but over the course of time this new movement found hostility and a lack of peace around, towards, and perhaps within it, leading to certain instances of dismissal of other groups and at moments, a pessimism



towards the religiosity of others. In today's world we can still see why such pessimism may occur, we all clearly have room to grow in our manifestations of peace, especially in our major traditions. However, today's cultural emphasis on goodness, internal and external health, positive body image, acceptance and respect between cultures and strangers, and liberal progress seem to be embodiments of Sophia's and the world's religious traditions' emphasis on abundance, life, and peace. May we all lean into these movements, deepening and strengthening them in spiritual, emotional, and physical health.

So, the Princess of Peace hopes to bring heavenly peace within and through us and for us to be an embodiment of this Divinely beautiful quality. How can you promote peace within yourselves and others today?

Often, to promote peace, we have to reject our propensities to force our ideas or mindsets onto others. Speaking of that, tell us something about the traditions and wisdom in your life in the comment section below. What has really spoke to you and why? How did you get to where you are today and how do you hope to continue to grow?

Furthermore, the Lady's advent in our lives is quite the blessing, as it entails accepting more and more peace within and through us, which is our own advent into loving humanity in parallel to the peace God exemplifies around us, even when it seems scarce. God promises to wipe every tear from our eyes in Biblical scripture, acknowledging that yes, we may have deep sources of trauma and pain, but also, yes, the Lord will heal us, comfort us, and protect us - ultimately showing all that peace reigns and suffering is temporal at best.

For ourselves, scripture and Swedenborg promote certain ways of becoming more peaceful, and thus, heavenly. Most of all, they tell us simply to purify our spirits. We can each do this in many ways, but it often starts by looking at our motives and actions with a somewhat critical or perceptive eye, like a good counselor, striving to see ourselves and our communities as we really are and where we may be destructive, selfish, mechanical, egotistical, and materialistic. From this we start to shun our "evils" and accept and celebrate our "goods." This process is helped by our deeper and deeper acknowledgment that we receive all of our qualities in a way, albeit in our freewill, both our hellish and heavenly internal orientations, and that none should be owned.

Weird, the same could be said for our material gifts. A major source of war and pain in today's world is our scarcity mindsets and structures, encouraging lack, domination, and strife. Our systems, thanks to our hearts, have been built in such a way as to enrich a few and inequitably distribute our production based on managerial power and cash capital contributions, not by the proportional contribution of someone's work (something that used to be considered capital of itself). No longer in a village mindset, a breakthrough in crop production profits the "owners" not the workers, nor even the person who created the breakthrough in most instances. Of course, these selfish

mindsets, quests for power, and us-versus-them mentalities transcend individuals and apply to our larger communities, leading to deep conflict, pain, and hate the world over.

Thus, it may seem cliché, but these problems start in the home. When our viewpoints and hearts are ostracizing, fearful, selfish, and dominating, so is the god in our lives, no matter how much our holy texts and sages can be read for promoting the opposite - viewpoints and a God of peace, hope, and acceptance of the stranger and their healthy ideas and beliefs. In this positive orientation, we would treat others' destructive modes and interpretations much like those in a sister, brother, or ourselves: with peaceful love, care, perception, patience and wisdom. In full knowledge that the Lord's advent is more clearly pronounced and unveiled when we better emulate the Princess of Peace.

All-in-all, real change starts in our hearts and the hearts of others. The true hope for societal transformation from war-torn to peace-worn starts with our dedication to it within and through us, acknowledging that it's a process all are called to in our diverse labels. Let us do our part to transform our world in peace, in freewill, and in God, whatever you call her.

Please, share your thoughts below. May Peace be with, in, and through you.

Amen.



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*Advent, Again*

*December 16, 2018*

## **READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

### **Isaiah 12:2-6**

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

**From Swedenborg**

### **Divine Providence #37**

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 a person. After their life in the world these degrees grow to eternity.

## **advent, again**

**Week 3 of Advent**

**By REV. Emily Jane lemole**

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The word advent means coming or arrival - and it is the spiritual practice of preparing for Christmas. The Christian Church long ago set aside the four weeks before Christmas to prepare for Christ's coming.

During Advent, Jesus is not yet born. He is carried in Mary's womb, over the long hard trip on a donkey's back, to look for a place to be born. This is a time of anticipation, hope, joy, peace and love, and then celebration. But before celebration comes preparation! Practicing Advent means we are going to actually do something to make way for the Lord. We examine our lives, read, meditate, pray and work on creating a clean, safe, loving, and wholesome heart where Jesus can be born in us.



It is not enough to know about Advent -- we need to do Advent. This puts God in the center. An awakened spirit is necessary to create the symbolic stable in our minds and hearts for the Lord's birth. How else can we truly listen and hear God's voice when it is drowned out by the constant noise of our business and our worries – our justifications, our resentments and our



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excuses.

Spiritual practice reminds us, so that we don't forget what matters most. Many religious traditions abound with spiritual practice. Advent was unfamiliar to me growing up and now is an essential part of my spiritual life. Advent is a framework to recall what exactly we are celebrating and why.

Years ago, a dear friend gave me this description of the difference between Holy days and holidays. We often lose sight of the Holy Day – and it gets lost in the holiday trappings engulfing it.

There is a world of difference between a holiday and a holy day.

On holidays, we run away from duties,  
On holy days, we face up to them.

On holidays, we seek to let ourselves go.  
On holy days, we try to bring ourselves under control.

On holidays, we try to empty our minds.  
On holy days, we attempt to replenish our spirits.

On holidays, we reach out for the things we want.  
On holy days, we reach up for the things we need.

Holidays bring a change of scene.  
Holy days bring a change of heart.

Thanksgiving has just passed. It can almost feel in today's world as if we're in a horse race and on to the next hurdle -- an uneasy feeling that we can't possibly get everything done! But what is it we really need to get done during Advent? We need to metaphorically clean out the stable of our soul and wait peacefully for Mary and Joseph to arrive. We must prepare a place for Jesus to be born or else we'll be so busy that we'll miss Him altogether and not realize it until later.

What? With all the shopping and decorating, and wrapping and planning meals, we need to clean out a barn? YES! - the stable of our soul.

Are you ready? That question will be asked many times in the coming weeks. Ready for what? Ready with cards, gifts, and dinner parties? FINE! But are our hearts and minds prepared? Are we spiritually ready? If we are frazzled, worried and don't know how we'll ever get it all done – we need Advent. If we suspect we may be missing the whole reason for Christmas – we need Advent.

The distractions grow brighter and louder every year, and we find ourselves washed up on the shore of Christmas Day like a shipwrecked sailor gasping for breath.

What can we do to make Christmas a deeper observance and celebration? A Holy Day!

Perhaps we can look at how the Way was prepared for Jesus.

First, John the Baptist came to prepare the Way -- by preaching repentance. Before Jesus can come in, our way must go out. Repent! The Greek word is metanoia; meaning to turn around, to change one's direction – change our minds.

Then, Mary! An angel came to Mary. Mary said, "Let it be to me according to Thy Word." We must be willing to listen, be obedient and open to the Lord's Word.

Finally, Joseph: he accepted his challenge with courage and hope. He also listened and obeyed. He trusted!

Maybe you are serene and unruffled by this season. I applaud you! But I need a process to stay awake -- to be able to be obedient, to repent and to trust -- or there will be no room in the Inn of my heart, except for me. It is so easy to become the Innkeeper -- NO ROOM -- no room for the birth of Jesus, because we are busy, overwhelmed by commercial distraction, social media, and just living -- taking care of what needs to be done. Then there is no room.

I'd like to share with you the story of Danny. An elementary school was giving a Nativity play. A little mentally challenged boy named Danny was playing the part of the innkeeper. His lines were "No room! No room!"

A teacher stood close by to prompt if necessary. Mary, Joseph and the donkey approached Danny. They asked for a place to stay in the Inn. As instructed, Danny refuse to let them in, with "No room! No room!"

Mary and Joseph turned away, but returned with the same pleas. "Let us come in."

Danny repeated, "No room! No room!" They went away only to return for the last time. "Please may we come in?" Danny was silent.

The teacher reminded Danny gently, "No room, Danny, no room!" she whispered. Danny was silent.

"No room, Danny. No room." Silence.

Then Danny burst into tears – and reaching out to Mary and Joseph he said, "You may have my room!"

If we are taking care of what really needs to be done then we can say, not as the Innkeeper – "No room" - But come into my heart Lord, Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee!

What can we do?

Here are some suggestions to enrich our Christmas experience:

1. Set aside time for daily reading and reflection about Advent and the Christmas Story – share

it with others.

2. Have an Advent wreath and a Nativity scene
3. Make a surprise gift of service to each member of our families, friends, or members of our community.
4. Set aside a time of family devotions on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning.
5. Attend church services
6. Give to a charity that speaks to what you really care about.
7. Give time, treasure, talent -- or all three.

An Advent Wreath is one way to celebrate this time and remember what our part is in preparing for Christmas. The Advent Wreath is a circle of four candles, three purple and one rose or pink, and dressed with evergreens. On Christmas Day, a white pillar candle is lit in the center – it is called the Christ Candle.

The circle stands for God's eternal love for us and all of His creation – as well as the circle of life. The evergreens symbolize life. The lit candles bring light into our darkness – the darkness of our troubled world with its loss, loneliness, confusion, violence and suffering, as well as our very own dark night of the soul.

The candle light reflects Jesus Christ – our Light of the World. The flickering candles remind us that we are called to be reflective lights for each other and the world. Let us burn brightly for one another!

The First candle represents Hope, our waiting with expectation and anticipation – our longing for the birth of Jesus in our lives today.

Hope is akin to optimism in that it seeks what is good, and wills what is good as far, of course, as we can see. We see from a point of view. That's just it -- a point -- a tiny dot. We know what we want to happen -- and we know that it doesn't always. Does that mean hope was for nothing? There is a much larger picture, and most of the time we cannot see or understand the long view. We need to readjust our expectations. We see life as we are -- not as it is -- we all have a different picture – a different point of view. God sees the long view.

The Second Candle symbolizes love, the love that the Lord has for us: He came to us as a human being so that we could have God with a face – God Who lived on earth and experienced all that we experience – and left a map by His life for us and said, "Follow Me". It also represents the love that we have for the Lord and each other.

Since today is the third Sunday let's focus on Joy – what it is and what it isn't, how we can experience it, and how we can become carriers of it. Carriers of Joy! Let's be contagious! To start:

What is the difference between happiness and joy? Are they interchangeable? Is it just a matter of degree? One reference states that the Bible uses the words "happy" and "happiness" 30 times and "joy", and "rejoice", over 300 times.

Lots of things can make us happy, but maybe what makes me happy doesn't make you happy.





Most people think money makes for happiness and yet one study showed that “beyond the point at which people have enough money to comfortably feed, clothe and house themselves, having more money – even a lot more money, makes them only a little bit happier.”

Perhaps you have seen the book "Thrive", comparing the happiest countries and cultures, and the qualities they share. None are wealthy countries!

Also, here are twelve things from Huffington Post Healthy Living that happy people do:

1. Express gratitude.
2. Cultivate optimism.
3. Avoid over-thinking and social comparison. (G.K. Chesterton writes; comparison is the thief of joy.)
4. Practice acts of kindness.
5. Nurture social relationships
6. Develop strategies for coping
7. Learn to forgive
8. Increase flow experiences
9. Savor life's joys
10. Commit to your goals
11. Practice spirituality
12. Take care of your body

In the lessons we heard about the shepherds and tidings of great joy. Rev. Dr. George Dole writes about joy so clearly and beautifully:

"What the angel was telling the shepherds about was 'great joy.' Obviously, it was not something the shepherds could get for themselves, it was something the Lord was going to give. This would seem to be telling us that happiness is not something that we go out and get, it is something that comes out and gets us."

He continues: "If we could remember the times when we have been happiest, most completely filled with joy, I suspect that this would be clear as day. It might happen when we looked at a beautiful night-time sky and were overcome with a sense of cosmic order and peace. It might happen when we were holding a baby and that little hand grasped one of our fingers. It might happen when we looked at a husband or a wife or a parent or a child and caught a glimpse of the unique, irreplaceable inner angel. Whatever the circumstances, one thing is always the same – the joy that fills us is not something that we manufacture, but something that seems to flow in, often catching us totally by surprise."

The angels said that this good news, or gospel, was that the Christ Child was born. And it was good news – not just for the shepherds, or just for people in the Holy Land, or later just for Christians – it was good news for all people! It affected everyone's spiritual freedom – the ability to be able to choose between good and evil. Christ changed everything for everyone.

The angels themselves knew all about joy, then and eternally. The New Revelation teaches much about Heavenly Joy – the joy of angels and of the Lord also, Who spoke of His Own joy in

the book of John: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Swedenborg does his best to describe angelic joy. He himself says it is beyond description. He does however say that the hallmark of this joy of the angels is loving one’s neighbor more than oneself.

This is the great gift given at Christmas and by the Lord’s life and resurrection. Christ came for everyone and implanted the promise of joy in all of our hearts.

Henry Ward Beecher said, “The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world’s joy.”

So how do we encourage that gift of joy that is our birthright and the Lord’s desire for us? Our country entitles us to the pursuit of happiness. Can happiness be pursued? – or like the butterfly, will it elude us until we let it land on us as a by-product and not a goal?

What makes us happy? Many people when asked what they most want in life answer “I want to be happy”. What do they mean? Happiness wears many different hats as it can be dependent upon what is happening in our life – good things and we’re happy – then the troubles or just stuff we don’t like and pop! Happiness disappears as fast as a bubble breaks!

From the movie Cool Runnings about a gold medalist –

“If you’re not happy without a gold medal, you won’t be happy with one either!”

A way of responding to life that sees abundance where others may not, feels gratitude for all that we have, and can endure loss and eventually bounce back up like the punching bag clown. This is a recipe for happiness.

And joy, deeper still, is a delight we feel that streams from God. Joy has to do with the other Advent essentials – Faith, Hope, Love and Peace. The Fruit of the Spirit spoken of in the book of Galatians is “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)) These are the qualities that lead to joy.

Swedenborg teaches that “Love is such that its joy is to be of service to others,” ([Arcana Coelestia 548](#)) and also, “to feel the joy of another as joy in one’s self, that is loving.” ([Divine Love and Wisdom 47](#))

Joy is inherently connected to love – of someone or something other than ourselves!

Jesus said, “If you keep My Commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” ([John 15:10-12](#))

So this is how we tap into the joy reservoir: Love God, love each other. And Jesus showed us

how.

It is not that we will be happy all the time – certainly life can knock the wind out of us – or just knock us flat. After a great loss, a deep grief, a tough diagnosis, a troubled relationship – the holidays, even our Holy Days, can be a difficult and painful time. Unbidden change in all shapes and sizes can dramatically rearrange our life. At these times, when we feel most alone – and joyless, Swedenborg teaches that the Lord is closest to us and never leaves us. While sadness and mourning do not deny joy, they wear somber clothes now, not the bright trappings of celebration.

Happy comes and happy goes. It depends on so many outside influences. Real happiness though, and deeper joy, are an inside job. We can choose joy over resentment, blame, complaint, bitterness and anger. Joy abides, remains (underneath it all) because it knows a deeper meaning – an underlying trust in the process of life. And joy is grateful for blessings given, even in the face of loss and sorrow. “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God,” said Teilhard de Chardin.

Today we are at the halfway mark for Advent. If we haven’t made time or given much thought to our spiritual preparation for Christmas – is it too late now? Nope! Never too late! The Lord stands at the door and knocks – always there, knocking on the door of our minds and the door of our hearts. He is always ready to be born there. It is never too late for us to turn around, to reform -- re:form our lives - to wake up to what matters most! Now is the time! The Lord says over and over again – wake up! If we do this, then comes regeneration – to be reborn – made new – God’s gift of a new will that actually makes us a new creation. God born in our hearts, just as He was born in a stable.

I’ll end with a Celtic Prayer on Joy:

As the hand is made for holding and the eye for seeing,  
You have fashioned me for joy.  
Share with me the vision that finds that joy everywhere.  
In the wild violet’s beauty;  
In the lark’s melody;  
In the face of a steadfast friend;  
In a child’s smile;  
In a mother’s love;  
In the purity of Jesus.

Amen!

***Mother Love Come Forth***

***December 23, 2018***

**READINGS**

**From Biblical & Hebrew Scripture**

**Luke 20:1-19**

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. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

**mother love come forth**

**Week 4 of Advent**

**By REV. cory bradford-watts**

A "mother" is likely the human role that most closely symbolizes the Divine. It's also the role that should probably most closely inform our own growing reception of God: the advent of the Lord or Lady in our living, intending, and creating. This is because the Lord is the parent (creator, propagator, protector, holder, and teacher) of all, and looks at everyone as her dear children. This is one reason as to why the Holy One is so often

described as a mother in Biblical and Hebrew scripture, as well as Wiccan, Pagan, Eastern, and transcendental movements. How can we foster more of Mother Love's motherly, divine qualities in us and our communities? For one, we should allow her to do as she's been striving to do: to come forth and increasingly advent.

Take a moment. Let us reflect on magnifying her presence while acknowledging her as the source of our strength, our goodness, our wisdom, and our life. Let us actually acknowledge her advent, not just in history as Jesus Christ or another incarnation, but as "je suis," as I Am, as Personhood, as we are, as Us. As we are in our best, most real sense, and let us continue to come forth.

Motherhood is perhaps the only essential role in society, and in a way describes all - fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and friends - in our ability to comfort, create, teach, raise, feed, love, house, protect, clothe, and uplift. Of course, a true, biological mother, has undergone a tremendous process of creation, endurance, and life, and often has that litany of gifts heads above her peers. The same is true for trans men who undergo this process of pregnancy and birthing as a father. In a word, motherhood in its best sense is another name for Divinity, put in a term that we can more easily start to digest.

The advent story that permeates this holiday / Christmas season centers on a mother, and the Mother. The young Mary is told that the Mother / Father has decided to advent into history as her son, Jesus, and that she, Mary, should be obedient, humble, and receptive to this calling despite the public disgrace it may bring. It is, in fact, the Spirit that will infuse her child that gives her the strength, wisdom, humility, and courage to do so: to accept this call to allow the embodiment of Divinity to manifest within and without her. May we be slightly so strong.

In the story, Mary gives birth to Jesus the Christ - Mother, Father, Divine Humanity incarnate, for we're told that the things that make us human, humane, come directly from Christ's Spirit, Jehovah. Indeed, Christ ends up shining like a sun: one form cannot contain her, neither can one gender, one tradition, or one understanding.

This advent story describes a history of Mother Love coming forth, and its symbolism calls us to emulate Mary in our willingness to allow this Divinity to disrupt life. May she disrupt our old way of living, hearing, doing, although it may seem hard, or even quite painful for a time.

The 18th-century scientist turned mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, repeatedly describes his view that the reason Christ took on the form of a son is that in Hebrew scripture a son symbolizes truth - in this case, Divine Truth made manifest, with the soul of Divine Love. He also explores throughout his theological writings his belief and perception that Jesus' external body and life eventually also became Divine Good (as well as Truth) through Christ's process of glorification, a Biblical term. This term for Swedenborg describes the Lord's process of overcoming all temptation, setting Heaven and Hell aright in the spiritual realm, and accepting the image of Divinity fully into her / his living.

This is why Christ ends up shining like a sun in what is called the transfiguration, and why s/he rises both bodily and in spirit after his crucifixion.

Further, in Swedenborg's interpretation of scripture, all stories are parables, and each character generally represents a part of our own regeneration stories, as well as Christ's glorification process. Both Mary and Joseph, Christ and Herod, represent a part of each of us as we accept Divinity (goodness and wisdom) into our living and our perception. Christ not only endured the trials of humanity in his own story but in nature and in each one of us, from the beginning to eternity.

Moreover, Swedenborg believed that yes, Mary was a real person. I'm sure that this birth was painful almost beyond compare for Mary, a physical task and calling that we sometimes lose sight of in favor of our focus on the babe (who seems to have had it relatively easy at this point, let's be honest). The Lord is most advent in her in the literal Christian advent story, in my opinion. Like with any mother, Goddess expressed herself astonishingly and wondrously in everything from Mary's body to her soul, working innumerable miracles, in, around, and through her.

The Lady works best in humble surroundings, whether it's the stable and the manger, or Mary herself. If we were to accept such humility for ourselves, perhaps allowing our society's material wealth to raise all like the ark in the flood, what astonishing advent might we be witness of?

I'm curious about Mary's expectations throughout this time. I'm sure she had a mix of trepidation and excitement, trembling and love. These feelings often accompany our own birthing process of the Mother's advent into our lives. Scripture teaches us that this process is one of turning away from the black hole of our self-service, not just in thought but also in deed, which allows us to accept Divine qualities.

What are some of these qualities, these gifts, in your opinion? Perhaps an ability to build community in all its various, healthy guises. It could be described as promoting health in our spirit and in our connections. In the end, whatever the details, I think it's the gift of raising up humanity and life, even in the face of monstrosity. What a blessing! Prescriptions in scripture help lead us to this health, such as the 10 Commandments in both their literal and spiritual meanings, but these prescriptions have to be assessed for yourself and put into process.

If you'll let me nerd out for a moment - I'm a fan of the TV show The Walking Dead (TWD), based upon a comic of the same name. It's a show about a few humans surrounded by mindless beings, set upon death and consumption. It may seem like a strange reference in an advent sermon, but actually, despite its bleak beginning and setting, it has inevitably become a story about family, about what it takes to thrive as a village in order to overcome death.

At its heart, TWD is about the advent of Motherhood. Really, it's quite the mirror for us in this season - a season that tries to consume us with its consumerism! The more each



character takes on their personal calling to a type of healthy motherhood, the better they and their various communities thrive in the face of a seeming lack of resources, in the face of a variety of villains, the metaphysical being the least of these. They tackle what it means to be a humble village striving for advent and to further life. For me, TWD's story is about the advent of Christ, a symbolic artwork about Mother Love slowly coming forth in community, in our sharing of resources, in our ability to find hope, peace, and innocence despite how the world may look.

We clearly have it easier than a zombie apocalypse today, and yet we insist on promoting zombism (the opposite of motherhood) in our economy and our mindsets, consuming and hoarding what others could use to survive, to our own detriment. Like a zombie bite, we strive to spread ourselves through uncreation, dominance, and consumption, not by promoting life.

Pop culture aside (sigh of relief), the Lord tells us again and again in all traditions and cultures that he desires a real advent in our lives and in our society. Not lip service, not a hollow label - us masquerading as real while often hiding our desire for flesh (breathed too soon).

Scriptures tell us that Mother Love cares not for our advent celebrations or beliefs without a real advent of love in our living. It was a lack of this motherhood mindset that forced Mary and Joseph into such a humble setting as the manger. Indeed, God had to search with a star in order to find wise people willing to humble themselves in the presence of her humanity and personhood. She had to search afar to find those willing and wanting to say that yes, Goddess wants to actually be born, to be actually acknowledged as having a reality - with a heart (will), a mind (wisdom), and body of motion (intention). All of which are infinite, yes, but not amorphous. These attributes are the mother of our own personhoods, she was not made in our image despite the opinion of our cynical inner voice. She is the source of our own embodiments, more human than human.

Mothers, in general, are much the same: often dismissed as less than human and yet working more than most to further our best selves. Thankfully, they are also often motivated by a deep love for us that we can scarcely comprehend. Similar to the Divinely Humane One, mothers often don't get the credit that they deserve, especially around the holidays. We overlook the mothers in our lives and in ourselves with their Divine gifts in favor of more attractive, seductive narratives that fit our biases and selfish notions of the hero, the star. But make no mistake, the Mother, the Christ - in Mary, in Joseph, in you - is the lead in this story. She has it rough sometimes, as many women do, seemingly relegated to the background. But the nice thing about being intrinsically eternal, hopeful, peaceful, Divinely joyful, and advent, is that you don't need us to believe in your worth, you just hope for it for our sakes.

Amen.