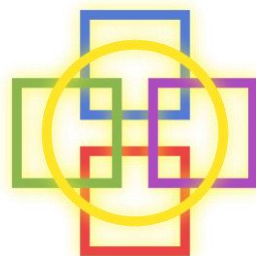




SERMON ARCHIVE 2009

Swedenborgian Community Online



The Magical Moment

January 4, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

Genesis 1 (New International Version)

Genesis 1

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

From Swedenborg

I have talked with angels about wisdom on occasion, and they have told me that wisdom is union with the Lord because the Lord is wisdom itself. They have told me that they attain this union when they banish hell from themselves, and that the union is in direct proportion to the banishment.

They picture wisdom, they said, as a wonderfully elegant palace with twelve steps leading up to it. No one gets to the step except with the Lord's help and by union with him, and for all of us, the ascent depends on that union. The higher we climb, the more clearly we realize that no one is wise on her or his own, but only from the Lord. We also realize that relative to what we do not know, what we do know is like a droplet compared to a vast lake. The twelve steps to the palace of wisdom mean whatever is good united to what is true and whatever is true united to what is good. Divine Providence, #36. NCE

"The beginning" includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation. ...

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no

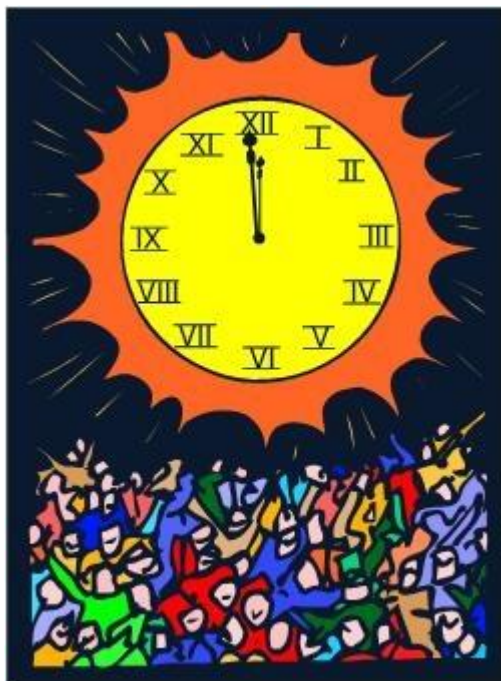
seed of goodness or truth has been planted. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ...

Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE

Message

That Magical Moment

10- 9- 8- 7- 6- 5- 4- 3- 2- 1



The ball drops! You kiss someone you love... open the champagne ... sing “Auld Lang Syne.”

Did you watch the ball drop from Times Square in New York City this past Wednesday night? I don't think I've ever missed watching that ball drop at midnight on Dec. 31st in the Eastern time zone.

Commentators on TV said things like: “Thank goodness 2008 is gone. It was a miserable year for a lot of us. Now we have a fresh start with a brand new year!” I find that reassuring and hopeful.

I always feel that way about the start of a new year. Whatever I didn't like about my self last year is history. Whatever I was in 2008 doesn't have defined who I am in 2009. It's a great sense of liberation and affirmation of the capacity to change.

It's an amazing yearly ritual that has a lot of meaning for many of us. Every New Year's Eve I put together my resolutions for the coming year... and try to remember the ones I made the year before.

Yet; 2008 existed just seconds before the ball dropped announcing 2009. Can we really make resolutions that change ourselves dramatically in those seconds?

Of course, we can become different in an instant. That's all it takes to open one's heart to the Divine energy ever flowing into us.

I believe that with our willingness and God's transformative power, we can make resolutions that, within seconds, start us on a new path.

So, given that God and we can transform ourselves so that at 12:01 AM on January 1st, we are different from whom we were at 11:59 on Dec. 31st, why can't that happen in ANY moment? Why just that one? Isn't God's transformation available to us in any moment? Can our mind see a ball dropping at any old moment that we are ready to transform?

Absolutely! We don't have to wait for New Year's Eve and the ball on Times Square to become different in an instant.

The process of transformation can begin in a moment. However, Swedenborg tells us that continuing this process is a life-long journey. How many resolutions from past New Years became forgotten in your life? Most of us have given up on resolutions that were unrealistic, or we weren't ready to undertake. But when we are ready to change, we start walking a path that contains many steps.

Swedenborg explained this pathway of spiritual growth by using the story of the Creation of the world. Swedenborg tells us that a deeper meaning of the story is about our own spiritual journey. Each of the 6 days of creation is another aspect of a transformative process.

In 2009, our worship focus will be on this process of spiritual transformation. Swedenborg called it "regeneration."

How do we make each day an opportunity for continuing transformation? How do we choose spiritual growth over stagnation in our lives? We'll look at how the Divine actually works with us and within us to create us anew in our oneness with God and all of creation.

For January and February, we'll look at Swedenborg's first stage of regeneration which is the deeper meaning of the first day of creation.

That first day is described this way in Heavenly Secrets:

*Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted.. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life. ...
Heavenly Secrets, parts of #16-17. NCE*

Our "Spiritual Movie" for January and February is "Regarding Henry." It shows us a dramatic example of beginning the rebirth of transformation. Henry is a highly-successful and well-to-do attorney. He races through his life with a focus on his career; we see his shallow relationships with his family and friends. We note his lack of moral judgement in his work.

Henry stops in a convenience store one day, to find that he has interrupted a robbery. He attempts to avoid getting involved, but the robber turns and shoots at Henry; hitting him in the head.

He is in a coma for days, causing tremendous fear in his family. Then -- it is a miracle -- he awakens!

The question is, though: just who is it that awakens?

It is not the Henry who existed before he was shot. It is a Self that Henry had never met. In fact, the new self is created daily with Divine energy.

The movie is an incredible account of the day-by-day journey to salvage a life in ruins; coming to terms with who he is to himself, to the world, and to family and friends.

It is a "rebirth" as Swedenborg described it.

The new "Reader's Guide" to Heavenly Secrets notes that the stage just prior to rebirth can be one of devastation; a stage called "the dark night of soul" by St. John of the Cross, and others in Christian mystical history.

Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived. [footnote #36 on page 602.]

Henry's story is about losing all that he is; and then becoming transformed with God into a new being.

It is also the story of each of us in our own lives. Are there times that you have felt so beaten down by life that you don't even know who you are? Through the writings of Swedenborg ... and of teachers from many religious traditions ... we'll explore how we can work with God to make those times into a rebirth.

Light for your Darkness

January 10, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

John 1

The Word Became Flesh

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.

3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it.

6There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 9The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.[b]

Genesis 1 (New International Version)

Genesis 1

The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 Now the earth was [a] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3223

3223. There are two lights whereby man is enlightened—the light of the world, and the light of heaven. The light of the world is from the sun; the light of heaven is from the Lord. The light of the world is for the natural or external man, thus for those things which are in him, and although the things which are therein do not appear to be of this light, they nevertheless are so; for nothing can be comprehended by the natural man except by such things as come forth and appear in the solar world, thus except they have somewhat of form from the light and shade therein. All ideas of time and ideas of space, which are of so much account in the natural man that he cannot think without them, are also of the light of the world. But the light of heaven is for the spiritual or internal man. Man's interior mind, in which are his intellectual ideas that are called immaterial, is in this light. Man is unaware of this, although he calls his intellect sight, and ascribes light to it; the reason is that so long as he is in worldly and corporeal things he has a perception only of such things as are of the light of the world, but not of such things as are of the light of heaven; the light of heaven is from the Lord alone, and the universal heaven is in this light.

[2] This light (namely, that of heaven) is immensely more perfect than the light of the world; the things which in the light of the world make one ray, in the light of heaven make myriads; within the light of heaven there are intelligence and wisdom. This light is that which flows into the light of the world which is in the external or natural man, and causes him to perceive sensuously the objects of actual things; and unless this light flowed in, man could not have any perception, for the things which are of the light of the world derive from it their life. Between these lights, or between the things which are in the light of heaven and those in the light of the world, there exists a correspondence when the external or natural man makes one with the internal or spiritual man, that is, when the former is subservient to the latter; and the things



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which then come forth in the light of the world are representative of such things as come forth in the light of heaven.

Message

Light for Your Darkness

Yes! I'm gonna let my little light shine! At least, I'll do my best in the midst of a cold and dark Maine winter, where power outages leave us with just candles for shining the light!

This has been one of my favorite songs since I sang it in my Baptist Sunday school as a child. I rediscovered it during the Civil Rights movement as a [folk song](#).

This one is by Bruce Springsteen with the Sessions Band Live in Dublin in 2006.

This song is either a [negro spiritual](#), or written as a [gospel children's song by Harry Dixon Loes](#) [1895-1965]. I've been thinking a lot about how God's light comes into our darkness, since this is the first stage on the spiritual journey.

There are so many people who come to mind whose lives demonstrate how God does this in our lives. Probably my favorite is Helen Keller, whose book *Light in My Darkness* tells of her spiritual journey that was guided by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Like many people, when I first became interested in the Swedenborgian Church, I had no idea that Swedenborg's writings had been so central to Helen Keller's life. She wrote:

I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

And you can read a [sermon](#) by her good friend and minister in the NY Church, Clayton Priestnal.

These are some of the words he spoke at her memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85.

At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight. The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no

existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service.

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.

Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Her spiritual comprehension is profound. When we talk about God's light in our darkness, most of us are using the term metaphorically, to refer a spiritual or emotional state. Most of us see physically with our eyes, but encounter many periods of spiritual darkness.

In our opening song, Johnny Cash sang:

*Just like a blind man I wandered astray
Straight is the gate and narrow the way
then like the blind man that got back his sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

*I saw the light I saw the light
No more darkness no more night
now I'm so happy no sorrow in sight
Praise the Lord I saw the light.*

He wasn't really singing about a physical light, but rather comparing God's light that is beyond the physical eyes.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

What we need to see God are spiritual eyes; not physical eyes. We need to hear God whispering in our heart; we don't need physical ears for that.

Helen Keller did not just say those words ... she lived them in her busy life of social activism. As a Swedenborgian, she believed that action is the greatest form of spirituality.

If Helen Keller could find God's light in her darkness, then so can the rest of us. Some days it feels so hard to sense any Divine presence in our lives. We can feel very much cut off and alone. In those times, remember Helen Keller who could not see or hear on this physical plane. But she came to learn that those senses are of little lasting value. It is our capacity to hear and see God in our hearts that is important. And this hearing and seeing are preparation for the spiritual senses we will have for eternity.

She wrote:

"I cannot see the stars scattered in the heavens; but other stars just as bright shine in my soul. Soul is very real and important to me."

When we despair of God's light guiding us through darkness, let's remember that God's light is inside. We may not see the divine light with our physical eyes. But we can see clearly with our spiritual eyes. So

many of us have “spiritual disabilities” and are fortunate to have the leadership of one with such perfect spiritual sight as Helen Keller.

Join in our closing song, “*I Can See Clearly Now*.” As you sing, focus on “seeing” with spiritual eyes, as Helen Keller taught us:

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone,
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*

I am singing this song with you this morning, and I can assure you that it is not literally true, for yet another snow storm blankets the clear skies of Maine.

However, that only matters to the physical. As you sing this, let it be true in your heart:

*Here is the rainbow I've been prayin for
it's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-Shiny day.*



Miracles on the Hudson

January 18, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 77

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

1 I cried out to God for help;

I cried out to God to hear me.

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

at night I stretched out untiring hands

and my soul refused to be comforted.

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

I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

Selah

4 You kept my eyes from closing;

I was too troubled to speak.

5 I thought about the former days,

the years of long ago;

6 I remembered my songs in the night.

My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

7 "Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again?

8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

Selah

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

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

11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD;

yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

12 I will meditate on all your works

and consider all your mighty deeds.

13 Your ways, O God, are holy.



What god is so great as our God?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM SWEDENBORG

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

MESSAGE

MIRACLES ON THE HUDSON



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It seemed to be an ordinary Thursday afternoon as US Airways flight # 1549 took off from New York's LaGuardia to Charlottesville. Within moments, the engines were both disabled – presumably by a flock of geese – and the pilot made a split-second decision to land in the Hudson River; about 3 blocks from the World Trade Center.

As the plane plunged to the earth, most passengers expected to die momentarily. *"I was thinking — no, I was positive — we were all going to die,"* said Paul Jorgensen, 38, of Charlotte, N.C., who was in seat 1A.

The pilot calmly chose a spot near boats to land his plane, to increase the chance of rescue. The landing was so smooth, that everyone had time to get out safely. Passengers moved respectfully, helping each other get out. They gathered on the two wings, as ferries quickly arrived and started rescuing people. One man urged those on the wing to dance ... as a way of staying warm.

All 155 people on board the plane survived, leading New York Gov. David Paterson to say, *"We had a miracle on 34th Street. I believe now we have had a miracle on the Hudson."*

The pilot, Chesley Sullenberger, walked through his sinking plane twice checking for anyone left behind. He said he was simply doing his everyday job.

What a great true-life story for us to ponder as we continue our theme of starting the spiritual journey.

The media grabbed onto this story with a happy ending as a miracle. One article this morning said: *These days, words such as "superhero" are bandied about a lot, mainly among fictional characters. Because that's so, somehow such a description of Chesley B. Sullenberger III doesn't quite bestow the honor that he deserves. After all, Sullenberger is the real deal. He proved what a real-life superhero he is last week when he guided to safety all 155 people aboard the US Airways jetliner he piloted.*

Another one commented: *Just when we really needed a miracle, we got one.*

Was it a miracle? Was it just people doing their everyday jobs?

We tend to think of miracles as something outside of ordinary reality and expectations. It is often something that comes from the Divine to bring about an outcome that is beyond human capacity to achieve. Yet, Swedenborg reminds us that reality is about God **and** humanity together creating a different world. A world where people strive to care for each other is not a miraculous expectation; it is the kind of world for which we were created.

Swedenborg wrote of a loving Divine who supports us in learning to love each other and to live with loving actions every day of our lives. We have come to expect cruel and violent behaviors in our world. Our media are full of stories of people cheating, lying, and defrauding. The world is filled with people who are hungry, sick, discouraged.

But from Swedenborg, we get the idea that God did not create us for the purpose of our suffering. Rather, creation was about light coming into darkness. It is the "light" that is to be our norm; not the darkness.

Martin Luther King said much the same thing. His "I Have a Dream Speech" was not about a dream that could only be fulfilled through a suspending of our ordinary reality. It was to be

achieved through our everyday reality of human and Divine together.
King said:

“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.”

The pilot was doing his job. His job was to put the welfare of his passengers above his own needs. His job was to use all of his experience and training to make sound decisions in a crisis. It wasn’t an event of God intervening to suspend ordinary reality; it was God being a part of our everyday reality with us.

Let’s not give into the discouragement around us, that our normal expectation is a world where people focus on fraud, disinterest, and personal gain. Let’s think instead of Martin Luther King’s “Beloved Community” and Swedenborg’s “New Jerusalem.” They are our birthright, and we are on the road.

Others just “doing their job” were a school of painters called the “Hudson River” school. They were inspired by the beauty of the Hudson River, and painted landscapes that showed the Divine in nature. Many of them were influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg.

Perhaps the Hudson River can be for us a reminder of God-with-us to make everyday reality an experience of “miracles” through the love we express in our lives everyday.

Who Do You Think You Are?

January 25, 2009

READINGS

BIBLE: Genesis I

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

SWEDENBORG

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

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

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

MESSAGE AND MOVIE

"Just who do you think you are?"

"Just who do you think you are?" How often has someone asked you that question? It's usually in a context of thinking you have done something that is beyond the bounds of who you really are and the role you should play.

But it is also a very serious question. Who are you? We don't think too much about it day by day. Of course, most of us go through a few years as teen-agers when we are trying to figure that out. The questions come again for most of us in middle age, as the "mid-life crisis" leaves us unsure of who we are.

However, some people have to face this question in the midst of extreme trauma; when they have lost all that they were, and don't know yet who they are becoming.

A survivor of a stroke or traumatic brain injury often has that experience. There are a number of true stories that have come out in the past few years: *A Stroke of Insight* and *The Butterfly and the Diving Bell* are two examples. A movie that tells this story quite dramatically is "Regarding Henry." It is based on a true story.

Henry was a successful lawyer. He made a great deal of money, and didn't care about what ethical compromises it took to make his money. He had little time for his family; he needed to make money. But in a sudden, tragic moment, Henry is changed forever. He gets in the way of a bullet during a convenience store robbery. Henry is in a coma for quite awhile. When he comes out, he doesn't know who he is or who the woman is who claims to be his wife; or the little girl who calls him "Daddy."

The movie takes us through those early harrowing days in treatment as Henry again learns to eat and to talk. Finally he is able to go home.

Everyone waits for Henry to become Henry again. But Henry cannot remember much about who he was. And what he does remember is a life he no longer wants. In the movie, we see him trying to work in the law firm again, trying to socialize with the legal community. He becomes extremely discouraged and depressed; realizing he does not know who he is.

His wife contacts the rehab center, and asks Henry's former physical therapist to drop by for a visit. The scene below is the conversation between them; a turning point in Henry's life.

You can also read a [description of a scene](#). This is a movie review from a spiritual perspective. About half-way down is a section called "*A Teaching Scene from Regarding Henry*." It is a description of the scene that plays above.

Henry has to stop trying to be what he once was. He can only be who he is now. And he can only find out who that is when he lets go of his own self. Many survivors of TBI have to grieve their former self. It is a death. Yet, only by accepting death can one truly live.

Have you had times like that in your life? Have you had to let go of something that you cling to as being "you", when perhaps it is an outer shell, rather than the essence of "you."

It is never an easy journey. Yet, we are all called to leave darkness behind when we respond to the warmth of the light. As we are awakened on the spiritual journey, we have to let go of the old self. Only then, can God help mold us into a true human-Divine partnership.

We are most ourselves when we allow God into our hearts, to guide and shape our identity. In the end, we realize that we are not so much leaving something behind, as we are expanding our awareness – with the inclusion of the Divine.

Henry makes a lot less money in the end. But he is happier than he ever was. He has begun his own process of *regeneration or rebirth*.

Regeneration or Recovery?

February 1, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

Genesis 1 (Contemporary English Version)

Genesis 1: 1-5

The Story of Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was barren, with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness. But the Spirit of God was moving over the water.

God said, "I command light to shine!" And light started shining. God looked at the light and saw that it was good. He separated light from darkness and named the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening came and then morning--that was the first day.

From Swedenborg

Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived.

19. The Spirit of God stands for the Lord's mercy, which is portrayed as moving constantly, like a hen brooding over her eggs. What is being brooded over in this instance is what the Lord stores away in us, which throughout the Word is called "a remnant" [or "survivors"]. It is a knowledge of truth and goodness, which can never emerge into the light of day until our outer nature has been devastated. Such knowledge is here called the face of the water.

20. Genesis 1:3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent.

People who focus exclusively on externals do not even know what is good or what is true; everything connected with self-love and love of worldly advantages they consider good, and anything that promotes those two loves they consider true. They are unaware that such "goodness" is evil and such "truth" false.

When we are conceived anew, however, we first begin to be aware that our "good" is not good. And as we advance further into the light, it dawns on us that the Lord exists and that he is goodness and truth itself.

Heavenly Secrets, NCE

MESSAGE

REGENERATION or RECOVERY?

I first heard about the Swedenborgian Church when I was a seminary student with the Boston Theological Institute. I was excited to learn that there was a Swedenborgian parish in Cambridge and a seminary in Newton. [At that time, our seminary – Swedenborg School of Religion – was in Newton, MA.

I called the school and asked to come for a visit, and as soon as I walked in they took me right

to a classroom. There, one of our future ministers was giving a presentation on similarities between Swedenborg's regeneration and the 12 steps of A.A. I was amazed! I had long admired the 12 steps as a process of spiritual growth, but I had never heard that they had similarities to Swedenborg's writings.

That was many years ago. I have since read books and talked with people about this topic. Many people see a similarity between Swedenborg and the steps. There are two ways that similarities are noted::

1. Historically -- The 12 steps may have been influenced by Swedenborgians involved in the emergence of A.A.
2. Theologically -- There are many similarities between the steps and Swedenborg's regeneration, because truth is found in many forms.

Personally, I feel certain that #2 is true, and that these basic concepts of growth are found in many spiritual traditions. Regeneration and the 12 steps are both tools to guide us on a spiritual path.

We will never know about any Swedenborgian influence on early AA and the steps, but it really doesn't matter. What does matter, to me, is that is such spiritual truth in both. I am intrigued, however, by the Swedenborgians who were involved in early A.A. I'd like to share a little bit about the background of Lois [Burnham] Wilson who founded Al-Anon, and was the wife of Bill Wilson who wrote the steps and co-founded AA.

Then I'd like to consider how we could use the 12 steps as a tool to more deeply understand regeneration as expressed in Creation.

LOIS BURNHAM WILSON [1891-1988]

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

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

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

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

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

importance of AA being separate from any religion.

Regeneration and the 12 steps

This year, our sermon focus is on the Creation story in Genesis. Swedenborg wrote that the story contains an inner meaning about our process of spiritual growth: he calls it “regeneration.” As we move through the six days of creation, we’ll talk about the 12 steps and consider how they can intertwine.

For Jan-Feb., we’re looking at the first day of creation.

Before regeneration a person is called the void, empty earth, and also soil in which no seed of goodness or truth has been planted. Void refers to an absence of goodness and empty to an absence of truth. The result is darkness, in which a person is oblivious to or ignorant of anything having to do with faith in the Lord and consequently with a spiritual or heavenly life.

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

He also says: *These steps ... have existed in many religions, philosophies, and psychologies throughout the ages. ... they work not only for the addictive-compulsive person, but for all people who desire to grow spiritually.*” [xiii]

Schnarr rewrites the first step to be applicable to everyone: *we admitted that we were powerless over our destructive tendencies and that, when we followed them, our lives became unmanageable.*

He points out the importance of recognizing our powerlessness.

I have come across some people – esp. women – who are not comfortable with the word “powerless.” Swedenborg has another way to talk about it: *an individual’s overall spiritual devastation--a preliminary step to regeneration. (The prophets have much more to say about it.) Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived.*

Swedenborg gives us a universal truth: we must let the old self die before a new self can be born. To become aware of our spiritual devastation can be overwhelming. We are not who we thought we were; there is so much more hidden in our depths.

This realization can feel powerless, as we discover that so much of our inner depths are beyond our conscious control. We have to let go of the illusion that we are just our surface self, that we have control over. Letting that old self die – with its comforting illusions – is a process of grief. We must grieve the old self before we are ready to embrace our new self.

Regeneration or recovery? Both, of course. Our spiritual journey is enhanced by use of the 12 steps. Whether we are striving for regeneration with recovery from an addiction -- or just regeneration -- we can benefit from Swedenborg’s understanding of the Creation story AND the 12 steps of A.A.

Spiritual Insanity

February 8, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

Psalm 91

Psalm 91 (New International Version)

Psalm 91

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. [a]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 If you make the Most High your dwelling—
even the LORD, who is my refuge—

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

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

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



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

14 "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

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

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

Footnotes:

Psalm 91:1 Hebrew Shaddai

Psalm 91:2 Or He says

From Swedenborg:

But such are not intelligent but insane in spiritual things, because they do not will good but evil, consequently they are averse to knowing and understanding truths, for truths favor good and oppose evil. From all this it is clear that the first step in the new birth is a reception of truths by the understanding, and the second is the will to act in accordance with truths, and finally to practice them. No one, however, can be said to be reformed by mere knowledges of truth; for man is able to acquire these and to talk about, teach, and preach them through his ability to elevate his understanding, above the love of his will. But he is a reformed man who has an affection for truth for the sake of truth; for this affection conjoins itself with the will, and if it goes on it conjoins the will to the understanding, and then regeneration begins. But how regeneration afterward advances and is perfected, will be told in what follows.

True Christian Religion, #589

Additional Reading:

We are constantly being given opportunities to re-awaken; that is to remember who we are – divine children of God. Teresa [of Avila] reminds us that this awakening occurs throughout our lifetimes and is not a once or twice only opportunity; rather, it occurs every day in our lives.

Megan Don, *Falling Into the Arms of God: Meditations with Teresa of Avila*, page 17

MESSAGE

Spiritual Insanity

Teresa reminds us that this awakening occurs throughout our lifetimes and is not a once or twice only opportunity; rather, it occurs every day in our lives.

What a profound concept – that we re-awaken spiritually every day; every moment.

In our linear society, we like to see clear steps taking us ever upwards. Then we can look behind, to see who has not yet reached our level. We can look ahead to see who has made it farther.

Such arrogance we have! We think we know what the steps involve and where we should go next.

Teresa suggests that God may not work that way. One of the great classics of spiritual literature is Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, where she shows how God leads us through seven rooms of a mansion until we reach complete union with the Divine. But she warns of the danger of being confident that God take us through room in succession.

Author Megan Don says:

Believing herself incapable of meditation after many attempts, Teresa [temporarily] gave up the practice. She warned against such nonsense and called for perseverance, saying that we need to release any expectation of what we think should happen and rely on God to guide us. There are many rooms in the castle, she reminded us, and we may be taken to any of these rooms at any time –it's not up to us to decide where we need to go. Our meditations and prayers can take us into places of deep peace, or into longing or pain; unbidden memories may surface, or feelings of lightness and grace may pervade our soul. As we journey toward the center of our being, may we be open to visiting all the rooms of our castle. [p. 45 of Don's book]

How disorienting to think that God might take us anywhere at any time; instead of up a neat and concise stair case! We often think of the spiritual journey as like the public school system of the U.S. We mostly all start in kindergarten or first grade. We know the exact status of every other student by grade – they are in the 4th grade, or the 8th or the 12th. We get a glance of the curriculum that's ahead. We're smug in knowing what the kids behind us will encounter.

Stages and steps ARE important on the spiritual journey. This year we focus on the 6 days of Creation with the 12 steps of AA. Some things have to come before others. God had to create the earth before he could put animals on it. One has to acknowledge their addiction to alcohol before making amends for the harm it has caused.

But what if there is a Guiding Spirit leading each of us – not necessarily through neat stages, but through mazes and labyrinths and spirals? It's reassuring to complete a program of study and get a diploma or degree. But God's curriculum isn't tidy with a definitive graduation point. Teresa reminds us that at any point, God might take your hand and lead you into the 4th grade to review an old lesson that never registered. Or lead you into an advanced college seminar far beyond your ability, but contains people and experiences that you need.

The 2nd step of AA is: "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Grant Schnarr points out that accepting this step means we admit that we are insane and have been leading a life of spiritual insanity. He says, "Spiritual insanity is knowing what is right, is hearing what is right, but doing the opposite anyway. In its purest interpretation, spiritual insanity is an aversion to or rejection of the truth. It is freely choosing to believe and follow something false over what is true." [p. 18].

The [story of Henry](#) is an example of this. [from the movie, *Regarding Henry*.] Henry was a powerful attorney who made a great deal of money. Yet he had little regard for ethics, or for relationships with others. He got shot in the head in a robbery, when he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Awakening from a coma, he had to learn again the basics of life – how to walk and to talk. In the process, he developed very different values about people and human relationships. He was no longer powerful and well-to-do. Yet, he came to see that life as one of insanity.

[Pema Chodron](#), a Buddhist nun, writes:

The journey of awakening happens just at the place where we can't get comfortable. Opening to discomfort is the basis of transmuting our so-called negative feelings. We somehow want to get rid of our uncomfortable feelings either by justifying them or by squelching them, but it turns out that this is like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

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

On the first day of creation, God brought light into a dark world. God separated light from dark; day from night. The journey begins with dawn – when we see light and realize we are in darkness.

Awakening to the Divine also means awakening to our selves, and seeking for a true nature under the veneer of our social mask.

Here is a powerful poem by the Sufi, [Rumi](#).

*For years, copying other people, I tried to know myself.
From within, I couldn't decide what to do.
Unable to see, I heard my name being called.
Then I walked outside.*

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.
The desire to go back to sleep can be intense.*

In this translation, Rumi sounds like an adult child of an alcoholic, or other dysfunctional upbringing. One can end up trying to copy others rather than finding one's true self. You have to wake up and walk outside.

We must constantly fight the intense desire to go back to sleep.

Yet we can live with the reassurance that no matter how many times we drift into sleep, into spiritual insanity; we are invited to awaken each moment of our lives.

John Newton wrote the words to *Amazing Grace* between 1760 and 1770. For years, he had been captain of a slave ship. He had a dramatic awakening during a turbulent storm. He wrote *amazing grace* in celebration of God's transformation. He became a pastor, and influenced many people -- including William Wilberforce who was a leader in Britain for the abolishment of slavery.

Stay awake, and rejoice in the return to sanity available to us every moment.



A Valentine to God

February 15, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)

1 Corinthians 13
Love

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

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

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

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

Footnotes:

1 Corinthians 13:1 Or languages

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

.

From Swedenborg:

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

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

Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE #424

MESSAGE

A VALENTINE TO GOD

Feb. 15, 2009

Wilma Wake

What did you do yesterday on Valentine's Day? Did you give a valentine to someone you love? Did you give a Valentine to God?

What! You didn't?? Don't you love God above all else? 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.

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

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

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

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

Her soul responds:

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

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

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

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

St. Teresa wrote this:

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

Here is another one by Rumi:

The Agony and Ecstasy of Divine Discontent:

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

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

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

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

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

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

For Swedenborg, the joy of feeling one with God, or the agony of feeling separate, are not particularly important in daily life.

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.

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 all have our 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 live in a sea of Divine Love , yet sometimes forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us. We may not feel this every moment of every day. But that's what Valentine's Day is for – to remind ourselves both of our love for each other, and the intense love of God that flows into us at every moment; whether or not we are aware of it. Maybe you didn't send God a Valentine; but you can spend some quality time together now.

You can meet now in the garden.

Belief without Faith

February 22, 2009

From the Bible:

Mt. 7: 13-29

The Narrow and Wide Gates

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

A Tree and Its Fruit

15"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

21"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

The Wise and Foolish Builders

24"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

28When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

From Swedenborg:

All this makes it clear that people who have love also have faith and consequently heavenly life. The same cannot be said of those who claim to have faith but do not lead a loving life.

A life of faith without love is like sunlight without warmth. -- the type of light that occurs in winter, when nothing grows, and everything droops and dies. Faith arising out of love, on the contrary, is like light from the sun in the spring, when everything grows and flourishes.

Heavenly Secrets, #34

Message

Belief without Faith

Feb. 22, 2009

The Experience of an Alcoholic

The alcoholic man had tried everything he could think of to stop drinking, but nothing had worked. One night, quite drunk, he wandered into the Calvary Mission, where a preacher invited people to give their souls to Jesus. The man jumped up and joined others at the railing.

Almost immediately, he felt his desire to drink lifting from him. He was able to walk home passing many bars, without stopping to drink. When he got home, he excitedly told his wife that he knew he had finally stopped drinking! His new-found faith would be enough.

After his wife left for work the next morning, he realized he needed a few drinks to get through the day. He kept drinking for several days, and then staggered to the hospital where he had dried out before. He was very discouraged; even suicidal.

A good friend, and fellow alcoholic, visited him and brought him a copy of William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

William James was the son of Henry James, who became an avid convert to Swedenborg as a young man, and raised his children Swedenborgian. William had issues with his father, and wouldn't claim his religion. However, his work as a psychologist focused on mystical experience, and seemed quite Swedenborgian in its viewpoint.

Bill wasn't interested in reading, so his friend, Ebby left the book with him. That night Bill – Bill Wilson, our alcoholic – reached the absolute bottom of despair, and shouted out, “*If there be a God, let him show himself.*”

“*Suddenly,*” he later wrote, “*my room blazed with an indescribable white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was weak by comparison. Then, seen in the mind's eye, there was a mountain. I stood on its summit, where a great wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of spirit. In great, clean strength, it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought, ‘you are a free man.’*”

And Bill Wilson was, in fact, a free man at that moment. He never again had another drink, and was a primary inspiration for the founding of A.A.

We now might say that Bill had just experienced the first two steps. He admitted his powerlessness, and he came to believe in a power greater than himself.

But how had that happened? And why didn't it happen before, such as when he gave his soul to Jesus at the mission a few days earlier?

Swedenborg on Faith

Perhaps the answer lies in what Swedenborg wrote about faith.

To Swedenborg, faith had to be part of love, to be in the heart; not just in the mind. Many people have a “faith” that is theirs because they were raised with it. They never question it, and they call it their faith. But, they haven't experienced it with their heart; they have only absorbed it as words in the mind.

When Bill saw the light in his room, he was having a spiritual experience. It was not something he thought he ought to believe. It was his own true belief from the experience of his heart that night. And it changed his life forever.

How is it that Bill, Ebby, and others came to understand “belief” in that way?

We cannot know for sure, but it does seem that Swedenborg's writings had an indirect influence on early A.A.

Carl Jung and A.A.

One of the earliest influences on the first members was Carl Jung.

In 1931, Roland H. discouraged by his inability to stop drinking, went to learn from Carl Jung in Zurich. He had a year of successful treatment, but as soon as he left, he drank again. He returned to Jung for treatment, but Jung told him that further treatment would be useless. He needed to have a true spiritual awakening, and he suggested a religious group. Roland became involved in the Oxford Group, out of which came most of the early AA members.

Roland passed the good news about a spiritual awakening on to his friend and fellow alcoholic, Ebby. Ebby also came to the Oxford Group, and learned there of a popular book many members were reading: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. It was the book he brought to Bill during his stay in his hospital.

Years Later, Bill Wilson wrote to Carl Jung:

"This concept of [of spiritual experience] proved to be the foundation of such success as Alcoholics Anonymous has since achieved. This has made conversion experience ... available on almost a wholesale basis." In his closing, Bill wrote: "...as you will now clearly see, this astonishing chain of events actually started long ago in your consulting room, and it was directly founded upon your own humility and deep perception."

Carl Jung had read Swedenborg's work during medical school, and had a spiritual psychology similar to Swedenborg's.

William James and A.A.

William James, a professor at Harvard, was an early spokesperson for a spirituality that is personally lived and experienced.

William James wrote:

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. "I've heard that said all my life," we exclaim, "but I never realized its full meaning until now." ...

First of all, then, I ask, What does the expression "mystical states of consciousness" mean? How do we part off mystical states from other states?

I simply propose to you four marks which, when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical for the purpose of the present lectures.

Ineffability.—The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.

Noetic quality.—Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect

Transiency.—Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day.

Passivity.—Although the oncoming of mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, as by fixing the attention, or going through certain bodily performances, or in other ways which manuals of mysticism prescribe; yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power.

James is writing about the knowing of spirit through experience, rather than the learning words about spirit without experience.

Our Own Experiences

As I grew up, I was given a faith tradition by my family and my church. It was our tradition, and I was to have "faith" that it was true. To even question its validity was to lack faith.

By college years, I had wandered away from that tradition, as it had nothing to attract me. However, when I learned to meditate, I came to have my own experience of a peace and love that had to be Divine.

This is what Swedenborg calls upon all of us to do. We need to open our hearts to Love, and to live our spirituality in our daily lives. We come to know God for ourselves. This "knowing" is not because someone tells us it is so. It is because we open our hearts and live our daily lives with Love.

A personal knowing of God is not always through a mystical experience – such as James wrote about and Bill experienced – it could be through opening our hearts to love.

Swedenborg talks about experience that comes into ones heart. It changes who you are; not the words that you utter. *A life of faith without love is like sunlight without warmth.*

That may be the deeper meaning to "came to believe." Not in the sense of learning a creed. But in the William James

sense of having a real experience; an encounter with the Divine.

Jung was right that it took such an encounter to bring an alcoholic to recovery.

The same is true for each of us everyday of our lives. God is not expecting us to come to accept some belief system in our minds; but an experience of the Divine in our hearts.

As Swedenborgians, we honor and respect the spiritual encounters we all have in our lives.

What are the experiences in your life that have formed your beliefs?

Into the Wilderness

March 1, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." 7 So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

Mark 1:9-15

9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

FROM SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 730

730. 'Forty days and nights' means the duration of temptation. This is quite clear from the Word of the Lord. The reason 'forty' means the duration of temptation is the fact that the Lord allowed Himself to be tempted for forty days, as is clear in Matt. 4:1, 2; Luke 4:2; Mark 1:13. And because every single requirement in the Jewish Church and in all other representative Churches before the Lord's Coming was merely a type and shadow of Him, so too were forty days and nights. In general they represented and meant all temptation, and in particular however long its duration. And since anyone undergoing temptation experiences vastation of all things that belong to the proprium and of things that are bodily - for things of the proprium and those that are bodily have to die, doing so indeed through conflict and temptation, before he is reborn a new man, that is, before he becomes spiritual and celestial - 'forty days and nights' therefore also means the duration of vastation. The same applies here where the subject is both the temptation of the member of the new Church called Noah and also the destruction of those who lived before the Flood.

MESSAGE

In today's scripture reading, Jesus is baptized and then is sent by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. Today is the first Sunday of Lent, and a time when many of us become aware of the wilderness journeys in our own lives.

In today's Swedenborgian reading, we are told:

And since anyone undergoing temptation experiences vastation of all things that belong to the proprium and of things that are bodily - for things of the proprium and those that are bodily have to



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die, doing so indeed through conflict and temptation, before he is reborn a new man, that is, before he becomes spiritual and celestial - 'forty days and nights' therefore also means the duration of vastation...

All of us, on our journey of regeneration, have to undergo conflict and temptation. We need them in order to let go of the old self and be re-born.

There is a modern-day story of a wilderness experience that is our movie – and our book – for March: Into the Wild. The book was written by Jon Krakauer in 1996 and made into a movie in 2007.

It is the true story of a young man, Christopher McCandless, who grew up in a well-to-do family. He had an excellent education at Emory University. Then, he gave away his law school tuition money – to Oxfam to help world starvation. He made his way to Alaska for a journey into the wilderness, to live alone and off the land. He did so for four months, keeping a detailed journal of his experience. It is a shock that he died of starvation, in 1992, only a few miles from civilization.

The story of why he went into the wilderness, what it meant for his spiritual journey, and the significance of his death, are questions we can ponder together this month. I read the book this week, and look forward to watching the movie during the month

There was something inside of Chris that drove him to the Wilderness. Like Jesus, he felt compelled to participate in that journey.

Part of what a wilderness experience means, is that we don't know what will happen there. We only know that we have to go there. And going there has something to do with our regeneration on the spiritual path.

Our focus this year is on the creation story in Genesis, and how Swedenborg sees it as story about our spiritual journey. This month, we are looking at the 2nd stage of Swedenborg's spiritual journey, corresponding to the 2nd day of Creation. He wrote:

At present the second stage rarely comes into play without trouble, misfortune, and grief, which enable bodily and world concerns – things that are our own – to fade away and in effect die out.

How often have you found that you need to walk into the wilderness of grief and misfortune to let go of something that is holding you back on your spiritual journey?

During March – and this season of Lent – we'll be looking at these times in our lives and, if you wish, sharing them with each other in our chats and forums.

Sometimes the wilderness makes the most sense when we make the journey in community. When we share our fears and confusions with each other, we can remind ourselves that the journey is all about our spiritual growth. We can support each other in walking through the hard path – and taking on the challenges of the wilderness.

One of the controversies about Chris is that he didn't accept help on his journey. Many people tried to convince him to take a map, to take more supplies, to listen to the experiences of those who knew the Alaskan wilderness.

For whatever reason, Chris did not take the advice. He made his own way. He had a deep and significant spiritual journey in that wilderness.

But, if he had had a map, he would probably have made it out alive.

Let's share with each other the maps we have found on our own journeys.

We were all "born to be wild." We were born to face the wilderness in the spiritual journey. But we weren't born to face it alone; we were born to learn how to support each other, and to accept help.

Our closing song is a message to each other in community: *I won't be afraid as long as you stand by me.*

I Am A Rock

March 8, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Biblical:

God said: "Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it exist to make a distinction among the waters and in the waters. Gen. 1:6

FROM SWEDENBORG

Swedenborg:

the 2nd state rarely comes into play without trouble, misfortune and grief. Heavenly Secrets, #8

12 Steps of A.A.:

made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

MESSAGE

In the third step of A.A., we are told:

Made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as we understood God.

Our movie of the month is about one young man's experience to do that.

It is the true story of Christopher McCandless, who grew up in a well-to-do family. He had an excellent education at Emory University. Then, he gave away his law school tuition money – to Oxfam to help world starvation. He made his way to Alaska for a journey into the wilderness, to live alone and off the land. He did so for four months, keeping a detailed journal of his experience. It is a shock that he died of starvation, in 1992, only a few miles from civilization.

The story of why he went into the wilderness, what it meant for his spiritual journey, and the significance of his death, are questions we can ponder together this month. I read the book last week, saw the movie this week.

Chris' hero was Jack London and his book *Call of the Wild*. Chris, too, felt that call.

En route to Alaska, he formed a bond with a father-figure, Ron Franz. Ron had lost his wife and son in a tragic accident many years previous. He, too, is looking for healing in human companionships. Chris sees the path to God as through nature. God is in all things, and can be found in all things. Ron leans towards relationship as that path; an area where he, too, seeks healing.

Ron later drives Chris north to his destiny in Alaska. Before letting Chris out of the car, he shows deep emotion as he admits that he would like to adopt Chris – perhaps as a grandson.

Chris says he'll think about it on the Alaska trip. Of course, he is never to return from Alaska. Here we have an example of Ron reaching out to Chris for redemptive human love. Chris is not ready for it.

The early part of his Alaska adventure, Chris is ecstatically happy. He is clearly connecting with God through the glories of nature. The movie allows us to experience the richness of this, as we see the majestic glory of the Alaska wilderness.

However, Chris becomes very ill, and realizes that he confused a poisonous plant for a nutritious one.

In the end, Chris reaches a profound understanding of happiness.

Chris found God in nature, and he found himself. And he realized what true happiness was as he was dying. Happiness is only complete when it is shared with others. Here he is writing in his journal – which was pages torn from books.

It is clearer in the book that Chris had turned down several opportunities to be better prepared for the journey. Several people tried to convince him to take a map, to take more supplies, to listen to the experiences of those who knew the Alaskan wilderness.

Chris' "Call of the Wild" was so strong, that he didn't want to wait to do things in a way suggested by others. But, if he had had a map, he would probably have made it out alive before encountering a poisonous plant.

It seems a tragedy that he died through a series of small human mishaps. Yet, again we see God at work. Chris did not connect with many people in life. However, he has touched the hearts of thousands since his death.

So, how do we "turn our will over" to God? I think the movie shows that there are many paths. But the inner "call of the wild" needs to be tempered. The love of the inner call needs the wisdom of the people of the world. We are not meant to be a "rock" or an "island." We are meant to live within loving human relationships.

Again, we return to the message from Swedenborg: don't try to live with all wisdom or all love. God meant for us to have both.

Let's use this season of Lent as an opportunity to look at how we balance Love and Wisdom; human relationship and nature in our lives. Let's support each other on our journeys.

The Coat of Spiritual Growth

March 15, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, 13 and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

14 So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

16 He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

17 "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.'"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. 18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19 "Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 20 "Come now, let's kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams."

21 When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. "Let's not take his life," he said. 22 "Don't shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the desert, but don't lay a hand on him." Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the richly ornamented robe he was wearing— 24 and they took him and threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

25 As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26 Judah said to his brothers, "What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood?"

27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood." His brothers agreed.

28 So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels [b] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29 When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. 30 He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy isn't there! Where can I turn now?"

31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. 32 They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."

33 He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces."

34 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave [c] to my son." So his father wept for him.

36 Meanwhile, the Midianites [d] sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.

Footnotes:

Genesis 37:3 The meaning of the Hebrew for richly ornamented is uncertain; also in verses 23 and 32.

Genesis 37:28 That is, about 8 ounces (about 0.2 kilogram)

Genesis 37:35 Hebrew Sheol

Genesis 37:36 Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac (see also verse 28 Masoretic Text Medianites)

FROM SWEDENBORG

AC 4776

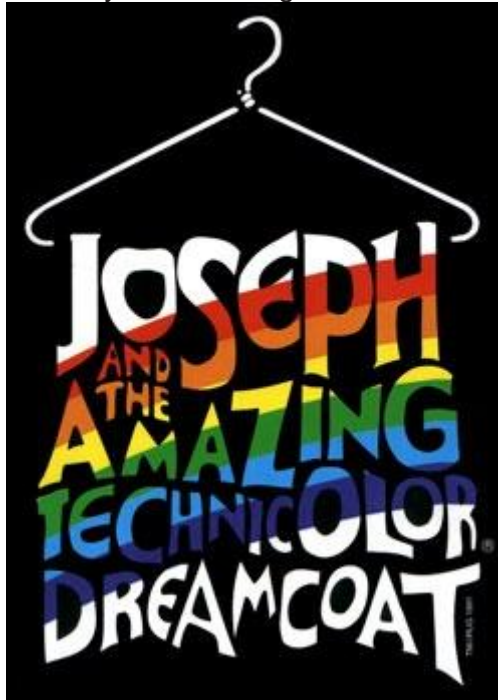
4776. An evil wild beast hath devoured him. That this signifies that the cupidities of evil had extinguished it, is evident from the signification of an "evil wild beast," as being a lie from a life of cupidities (n. 4729), ... A life of cupidities consists in loving self only, and not the neighbor except from self, or for the sake of self. Hence those who are in this life extinguish charity in themselves; and those who extinguish charity, extinguish also love to the Lord; for there is no other means of loving the Lord than charity, because the Lord is in charity....

[2] That no one can be saved unless he has lived in the good of charity, and so has become imbued with its affections, which are to will well to others, and from willing well to do well to them; and that no one can receive the truths of faith - that is, become imbued with them and appropriate them to himself - but he who is in a life of charity has been made manifest to me from those who are in heaven, with whom I have been permitted to converse. There all are forms of charity, with beauty and goodness according to the quality of their charity; their delight, satisfaction, and happiness are from their being able to do good to others from good will. The man who has not lived in charity cannot possibly know that heaven and its joy consist in willing well and in doing well from willing well, because his heaven is willing well to himself, and from this willing well doing well to others, when yet this is hell. For heaven is distinguished from hell in this, that heaven, as above said, is doing good from good will, and hell is doing evil from ill will. They who are in love toward the neighbor do good from good will; but they who are in the love of self do evil from ill will. The reason of this is that they love no one but themselves, and others only so far as they see themselves in them, and them in themselves; they also regard these with hatred, which manifests itself as soon as they recede and are no longer theirs. This is like robbers, who so long as they are banded together love one another, but still at heart desire to kill one another, if plunder may thus be obtained.

MESSAGE

The Coat of Spiritual Growth

A number of years ago, I went to a local summer theater with friends to see the musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*. I was delighted by the rousing program of singing through the story of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery because they were jealous of the beautiful coat his father had made for him. When I first heard the song *There's one more angel in heaven*, I couldn't stop laughing! When Joseph's brothers return to give a cover story to Dad about the wild beast that devoured Joseph as he fought to save them, I was quite amused at how, through music and dance, they try to convince their father that Joseph died a hero. I've heard the musical many times since then, but I still can't stop chuckling when I hear the music. If you haven't seen this Webber and Rice musical – or haven't seen it for a long time – you can follow [this link](#) to a great series of U-Tube presentations on the story that is fun for the whole family. These are scenes from the 1999 film. Like in the play, there is no spoken dialog; the story is told through music and dance.



Swedenborg, of course, gives us the deeper meaning of this well-known Biblical story.

An evil wild beast hath devoured him. That this signifies that the cupidities of evil had extinguished it, is evident from the signification of an "evil wild beast," as being a lie from a life of cupidities (n. 4729), ... A life of cupidities consists in loving self only, and not the neighbor except from self, or for the sake of self. Hence those who are in this life extinguish charity in themselves; and those who extinguish charity, extinguish also love to the Lord; for there is no other means of loving the Lord than charity, because the Lord is in charity....

The lie the brothers tell comes from self-love. They think only of themselves, and cannot see the needs of others. They have no love for others, or for the Divine.

This is the story of all of us before spiritual growth begins. ... *The first stage is called void, emptiness, and darkness.* [AC 7] However, in the second stage, *a distinction is made between the Lord's, and the things that are our own.* As the story unfolds, we see the many tragedies impacting the lives of all of the characters, until the second stage can be seen. Swedenborg tells us that this stage rarely comes *into play without grief, trouble, and misfortune.* This story is one that demonstrates the trauma, fear, and starvation that impacts the lives of all of these people. By the end, we see the spiritual growth in everyone.

This second stage in Swedenborg's account of spiritual growth is sometimes compared to the second and third steps in Alcoholics Anonymous. There are many ideas about ways that there are similar themes in both the 12 steps and Swedenborg's spirituality. You can [follow this link to see one possible scenario that I like.](#)

The scenario shows you the general outline of our journey during 2009, exploring Swedenborg's stages of growth with the 12 steps of A.A.

This month we're looking at the 3rd step, "made a decision to my will and life over to the care of God as we understood God" and we are noting the similarities with Swedenborg's 2nd stage of growth.

Swedenborg's understanding of the seven days of creation [six days of creation; one of rest] are themes that we find other places throughout mystical literature.

One of them is St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, where she describes seven rooms en route to God. Swedenborg tells us that it is a long journey from our first awareness of something beyond ourselves, to our recognition of a Divine, to now letting Her 7 rooms have much similarity to Swedenborg's seven stages. Here is what Teresa says about the 2nd room of the mansion:

These souls hear our Lord calling them, for as they approach nearer to where His Majesty dwells He proves a loving Neighbour, though they may still be engaged in the amusements and business, the pleasures and vanities of this world. While in this state we continually fall into sin and rise again ... Yet such are the pity and compassion of this Lord of ours, so desirous is He that we should seek Him and enjoy His company, that in one way or another He never ceases calling us to Him. So sweet is His voice, that the poor soul is disconsolate at being unable to follow His bidding at once, and therefore, as I said, suffers more than if it could not hear Him. [The 2nd mansions, chapter 1, point 4].

Evelyn Underhill, noted author on mysticism, also describes a series of stages on the mystical journey of spiritual growth. After the initial awakening [perhaps similar to Swedenborg's first stage], she talks about a period of "[purgation](#):"

Primarily, then, the self must be purged of all that stands between it and goodness: putting on the character of reality instead of the character of illusion or "sin." It longs ardently to do this from the first moment in which it sees itself in the all-revealing radiance of the Uncreated Light.

There are so many we can look to see the story of spiritual growth. Swedenborg's account of creation is a story of everyone's spiritual journey. Similar themes are found in the 12 steps of A.A., and in much mystical literature, such as St. Teresa's [Interior Castle](#) and Evelyn Underhill's [Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness.](#)

Of course, the most important place to find this story unfolding is in all of lives. How does this

journey of spiritual growth play out within your own life?

The closing song is a scene towards the end of the story of Joseph, where there is growth and reconciliation, here is a delightful calypso: It takes place when Benjamin and the brothers have been 7 years of starvation, and to Egypt to beg for food. They don't recognize Joseph, and he has an item hidden on Benjamin and accuses him of theft. Soon, Joseph reveals himself, and a happy family reunion takes place.

Must We Surrender?

March 22, 2009

READINGS

16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" the man inquired.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother, '[d]' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.' '[e]'"

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

FROM SWEDENBORG

True Christian Religion (Ager) n. 104

104. (8) The progress towards union was His state of Exinanition], [emptying] and the union itself is His state of Glorification. It is acknowledged in the church that when the Lord was in the world He was in two states, called the state of exinanition and the state of glorification. The prior state, which was the state of exinanition, is described in the Word in many places, especially in the Psalm of David and also in the Prophets, and particularly in Isaiah (chapter 53) where it is said: That He emptied His soul even unto death (Isa. 53:12).

MESSAGE

I was first discovering the 12 steps and becoming a feminist about the same time in my life.

Those two parts of my life sometimes clashed.

This was especially true with the Third Step:

Made a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of God as I understood him.

First of all, God was not a "him" to me. But in any case, I had no intention of turning my will and life over to anyone – human OR Divine. I knew that my spiritual wholeness depended on claiming my own will and life after having let them be taken from me in so many ways.

I wrote a thesis about how so many of the words in the 12 steps were geared to men. Many people

changed “as I understood him” to “as I understood God.”

A deeper question for me was whether some of the very concepts of recovery exclude women from full participation.

Many women have felt that was the case, and they have found other ways to express the step.

One feminist version goes “*became willing to change and asked for help.*”

Another one from Charlotte Kasl suggests:

I declared myself willing to look into my inner wisdom , to listen, and to act based on these truths.”

So life experiences sometimes lead me to change this concept of “turning over my will and life.”

Yet, much of my own mystical life has brought to places that I could describe as not only “turning it over” but as a surrender and loss of all I had known as “me.”

I would that Swedenborg addresses this concept in terms of “Distinguishable Oneness” between Divine and human. And exanination [“emptying on the cross.”] -- more to come over the next couple of week

Some of the mystical writings from many traditions take us deep into the feeling mode of this concep.

Let’s open ourselves to ways this concept is expressed in some of the world’s spiritual traditions.

How do we distinguish for ourselves the kind of surrender that comes from political oppression; from that which comes from a deep encounter with the Divine? I don’t have answers, but I do have some traditions to share.

Defeated by Love

by Rumi

Defeated by Love

The sky was lit

by the splendor of the moon

So powerful

I fell to the ground

Your love

has made me sure

I am ready to forsake

this worldly life

and surrender.

to the magnificence

of your Being

The same concept of surrender to God can be found in the writings of many Christian mystics. St. Teresa of Avila is a classic example of mystical surrender. I find this to be a profound poem about mystical surrender.

*I am Yours and born of You,
What do You want of me?*

*Majestic Sovereign,
Unending wisdom,
Kindness pleasing to my soul;
God sublime, one Being Good,
Behold this one so vile.*

*Singing of her love to you:
What do You want of me?*

*Yours, you made me,
Yours, you saved me,
Yours, you endured me,
Yours, you called me,
Yours, you awaited me,
Yours, I did not stray.
What do You want of me?*

*Good Lord, what do you want of me,
What is this wretch to do?
What work is this,
This sinful slave, to do?
Look at me, Sweet Love,
Sweet Love, look at me,
What do You want of me?*

*In Your hand
I place my heart,
Body, life and soul,
Deep feelings and affections mine,
Spouse -- Redeemer sweet,
Myself offered now to you,
What do You want of me?*

*Give me death, give me life,
Health or sickness,
Honor or shame,
War or swelling peace,
Give me death, give me life,
Health or sickness,
Honor or shame,
War or swelling peace,
Weakness or full strength,
Yes, to these I say,
What do You want of me?*

*Give me wealth or want,
Delight or distress,
Happiness or gloominess,
Heaven or hell,
Sweet life, sun unveiled,
To you I give all.
What do You want of me?*

*Give me, if You will, prayer;
Or let me know dryness,
And abundance of devotion,
Or if not, then barrenness.*



*In you alone, Sovereign Majesty,
I find my peace,
Give me then wisdom.
Or for love, ignorance,
Years of abundance,
Or hunger and famine.
Darkness or sunlight,
Move me here or there:
What do You want of me?*

*If You want me to rest,
I desire it for love;
If to labor,
I will die working:
Sweet Love say
Where, how and when
Calvary or Tabor give me,
Desert or fruitful land;
As Job in suffering
Or John at Your breast;
Barren or fruited vine,
Whatever be Your will:
What do You want of me?*

*Be I Joseph chained
Or as Egypt's governor,
David pained
Or exalted high,
Jonas drowned,
Or Jonas freed:
What do You want of me?*

*Silent or speaking,
Fruitbearing or barren,
My wounds shown by the Law,
Rejoicing in the tender Gospel;
Sorrowing or exulting,
You alone live in me:
What do You want of me?*

Yours I am, for You I was born:

Does God expect us to surrender like this? To turn over our lives and will? Do you feel this:

Give me...
Years of abundance,
Or hunger and famine.
Darkness or sunlight,
Move me here or there:
What do You want of me?



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Most of us pray: "Give me abundance," not : Give me abundance or *famine* -- as is your will."

I know moments of a blissful surrender when I can pray Teresa's prayer; Most days, however, that would not be the honest expression of my heart. I pray to have the food, shelter, and medical care I need. If I am hungry and sick, I rarely pray "thank-you for this, God." I am more likely to blame God for the situation in a way that distances me from the Divine. Is that a less worthy attitude than St. Teresa's?

I don't know the answer. But in my view, Swedenborg talks about many paths to the one Divine. God has more facets than we do. Personally, I think sincere prayer comes from the heart. And it is the sincerity that God desires of us.

Most of us have a wide range of prayers throughout our lives. I think the expression of honesty is a type of surrender to that which exists in our hearts at a given moment.



Living Life to Lose It

March 29, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

John 12:20-36

20Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. see Jesus." 22Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

FROM SWEDENBORG

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

Believing that the Lord's suffering on the cross was redemption itself is a fundamental error on the part of the church. That error, along with the error about three divine Persons from eternity, has ruined the whole church to the point that there is nothing spiritual left in it anymore

TCR 114:6-7 NCE

MESSAGE

Living Life to Lose It

As we approach Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter, it is a good 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 – more than his resurrection – 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 in order 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 everyday. 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. Actually, we have to 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.

We can find this meaning in our own lives by looking to the times when we lose part of our "ego" self; and come closer into relationship with the Divine. What times in your life have you experienced this?

Heysanna

April 5, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Mark 11

The Triumphal Entry

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

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

"Hosanna![a]"

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

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

"Hosanna in the highest!"

FROM SWEDENBORG

458. And palms in their hands.- That this signifies that they are in the good of life according to those truths, is evident from the signification of a palm, as denoting the good of truth, or spiritual good, concerning which we shall speak presently; and from the signification of hands, as denoting power, and thence all ability in man; see above (n. 72, 79). Therefore their having palms in their hands signifies that the good of truth was in them, or that they were in the good of truth. The good of truth, when possessed by any one, is the good of life, for truth becomes good by a life in agreement with it, previously it is not good in anyone. For when truth is in the memory only and thence in the thought, it is not good, but it becomes good when it enters into the will, and thence into act, the will itself being that which transforms truth into good. This is evident from this fact, that what a man wills, he calls good, and what he thinks, he calls truth. For the interior will of man, which is the will of his spirit, is the receptacle of his love. For what a man loves from his spirit, he wills, and what he thence wills, this he does; wherefore the truth which is of his will is also of his love, and whatever pertains to his love, he calls good. From these things it is evident how good in man is formed by means of truths, and that all good, which is good in man, is good of the life. It is supposed that there is a good also of the thought, although it be not of the will, because a man can think that this or that is good; nevertheless it is not good there, but truth. To think what is good, is truth, and also to know and thence to think what is good are classed amongst truths; but if a man so loves that truth which is in the thought as to will, and from willing, to do it, then, because it is of the love, it becomes good.

A.C.

MESSAGE

When Lloyd Webber was a young man of 17, he received a letter from a twenty one-year-old law student named Tim Rice: "Dearest Andrew, I've been told you're looking for a "with it" writer of lyrics for your songs, and as I've been writing pop songs for a while and particularly enjoy writing the lyrics I wonder if you consider it worth your while meeting me. " Tim Rice.

They didn't come up with much until they were hired in 1968 to write a religious concert for a prep school.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat emerged. It was twenty minutes long, but was performed over and over again -- and each time grew longer. The success led to a record deal. The Biblical theme had worked well. This time they wanted to portray the last week in the life of Jesus from the perspective of Judas.

I still have in my collection of LP's, a scratched set of 2 records with a tattered booklet of lyrics. I was a senior in college the year the album came out; 1969. I had declared myself to be an agnostic, in protest of a concept of God that condemned people to hell based on their religious beliefs.

Jesus Christ Superstar was a story I could relate to. Instead of Jesus being "all good" and Judas "all bad," they were both complex human beings. I identified with a Judas who claimed Jesus needed him to in order to be crucified. I loved a Jesus whose prayer in the Garden of Getheseme was a tirade against God.

The first rock opera struck a chord with my generation. After being an album, it became a play and then, in 1973, a movie. I finally have had to upgrade my old scratched album to CD and my fading old video to a DVD. In 2000, the opera was again a stage play made into a movie.

You are invited on a [Musical Blog](#) Through Holy Week. Each day we'll follow the last week of Jesus through the opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Look at the events related to Palm Sunday through *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

What's the Buzz?

3. What's The Buzz.

(Bethany, Friday Night)

Apostles:

What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

Jesus:

Why should you want to know?

Don't you mind about the future, don't you try to think ahead

Save tomorrow for tomorrow, think about today instead

Apostles:

What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

Jesus:

I could give you facts and figures

I could give you plans and forecasts

Even tell you where I'm going -

Apostles:

When do we ride into Jerusalem

Jesus:

Why should you want to know?

Why are you obsessed with fighting times
and fates you can't defy?

If you knew the path we're riding you'd
understand it less than I

Apostles:
What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

Mary Magdalene:
Let me try to cool down your face a bit

Jesus:
That feels nice, so nice
Mary that is good
While you prattled through your supper where and when and who
and how
She alone has tried to give me what I need right here and now

Apostles:
What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening
4. Strange Thing Mystifying.

Judas:
It seems to me a strange thing, mystifying
That a man like you can waste his time on women of her kind
Yes I can understand that she amuses
But to let her stroke you, kiss your hair is hardly
in your line
It's not that I object to her profession
But she doesn't fit in well with what you teach and say
It doesn't help us if you're inconsistent
They only need a small excuse to put us all away

Jesus:
Who are you to criticise her? Who are you to despise her?
Leave her, leave her, let her be now
Leave her, leave her, she's with me now
If your slate is clean - then you can throw stones
If your slate is not then leave her alone
I'm amazed that a man like you can be so shallow thick
and slow
There is no man among you who knows or cares if I come or go

All (save Judas):
No you're wrong! You're very wrong!
How can you say that!

Jesus:
Not one - not one of you!

Do you identify with the disciples here? Do you often want to know all the details of God's plan for your life, instead of acceptance the guidance for the next step? Like the disciples, we often want a blueprint of everything that lies ahead before we take the first step on a journey.

HOSANNAH

1. Hosanna.

Crowd:
Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho

Sanna Hey Sanna Ho Sanna
Hey JC, JC won't you smile at me?
Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Superstar

Caiaphas:

Tell the rabble to be quiet we anticipate a riot
This common crowd is much too loud
Tell the mob who sing your song
That they are fools and they are wrong
They are a curse, they should disperse

Crowd:

Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho
Sanna Hey Sanna Ho Sanna
Hey JC, JC you're alright by me
Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Superstar

Jesus:

Why waste your breath moaning at the crowd?
Nothing can be done to stop the shouting
If every tongue was still the noise would still continue
The rocks and stones themselves would start to sing

Crowd (with Jesus):

Hosanna Heysanna Sanna Sanna Ho
Sanna Hey Sanna Ho Sanna
Hey JC, JC won't you fight for me?
Sanna Ho Sanna Hey Superstar

Do you sometimes find that you read your own meaning into an event without asking for God's meaning? Here the disciples ignore the warning signs of Caiaphas. They say JC is "alright" and then ask him to fight for them and then die for them.

They have their own plan for how this march will result in a battle where Jesus -- and they-- will gain earthly power.

It is good to shout and sing. It is important to sing. It is also important to let God reveal to us the meaning of our singing. Only God has the true understanding of our song.



Alleluia

April 12, 2009

READINGS

from the Bible

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

The Resurrection

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

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

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

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

from Swedenborg

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

114:6

MESSAGE

Alleluia

Christ the Lord is risen today! Alleluia! Alleluia! All over the world this morning Christians are shouting with joy! This is a glorious day of celebration and affirmation of life! [of course, our Greek Orthodox brothers and sisters will celebrate on a different date.]

*Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!*

Jesus has saved our souls! That is incredibly comforting. That is, of course, if our souls need saving.

This is where Swedenborgian Christians veer off on a side road from most of Christendom.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

We all are singing and shouting Alleluia today. Yet, the Swedenborgian “Alleluia” has a different “ring” to it.

Throughout Christian history, “he died to save our souls” has had very specific meanings.

As Marcus Borg says: “*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 sinners. In order for God to forgive us, a substitutionary sacrifice must be offered. But it would not be adequate for an ordinary human being to be the sacrifice, for such a person would be a sinner and would only be dying for his or her own sins. Thus the sacrifice must not be a sinner, but a perfect human being.*” Yet this view of the crucifixion didn’t come together for a thousand years after the death of Jesus.

To accept that the crucifixion was a sacrifice to save our souls involves a few assumptions.

1. The first is that we are born sinners.
2. The 2nd it that there is nothing we can do to remove our sins.
3. Therefore, our souls must be saved from hell, where a judgmental God would send us if a sacrifice were not made for our sins.

Only through the crucifixion can we have any hope of an eternity in heaven; assuming of course that we accept and believe in this sacrifice.

There are other ways to understand this momentous event that do not involve a substitutionary sacrifice. They start with different assumptions:

1. We are born not as sinners, but with an inclination towards sin.
2. There is no judgmental God who sends us to heaven or hell. We make that choice for ourselves.
3. To prepare ourselves for heaven, we need to live lives of loving actions.

Some really major differences there! The Swedenborgian perspective is that heaven is for every person of any faith tradition, and we create our own pathway there through how we live our lives.

So what **was** this event all about? Why are Swedenborgian Christians singing “Alleluja” this morning?

Let's look at the poetry of St. Teresa of Avila. Here is a poem of hers:

I WOULD CEASE TO BE

God
Dissolved
My mind – my separation.
I cannot describe my intimacy with Him.
How dependent is your body's life on water and food and air?
I said to God, "I will always be unless you cease to be,"
And my Beloved replied, "And I
would cease to Be
if you
died."

She was writing about the spiritual journey, which we all encounter sooner or later. One of her more famous works is "Interior Castle" where she describes the journey as moving through the rooms of a castle. One finds God in the most interior room, where one experiences a kind of marriage with God. This is the state of union—the goal of our spiritual journey.

Many other traditions have written similar accounts of a journey to the Divine that ends in becoming one with the Divine.

Swedenborg, too, talks about a series of stages that lead to "conjunction" or "union" as the "God-man.

However, added another dimension to this issue.

Jesus had a journey that took him through various stages of spiritual growth. He endured many temptations, and, as he resisted them, he became closer to God.

Jesus came into union with God by his death and resurrection. Swedenborg gives the name "*glorification*" to describe the process of Jesus merging into oneness with God.

Many traditions talk about a Dark Night of the Soul before moving into union. In a similar vein, Swedenborg says that on the cross, Jesus faced his final temptations and overcame them. He "emptied out" his ego self. His final merging with God was glorification.

The cross and the resurrection are powerful accounts of how Jesus and God became one: The Divine Human. And they are a narrative of a universal web that awaits all of us down the road.

What happened to Jesus on the cross is not that different from what happens to us when we move closer to God towards that ultimate Union. Jesus modeled for us the kind of life that prepares us for heaven.

This is a big difference in how one understands "Alleluia."

Occasionally, someone asks me the question: what if you're wrong? What if you die and meet a judgmental God who says: "You are going to hell, because you did not believe that Jesus die as a sacrifice for your sins?" *Don't you think you should believe in the sacrificial atonement just in case?*

Well, I peer out into the Cyber world of so many people I cherish; I look out at our earth filled with people who are Jews, or Muslims, or Hindus or wiccans or atheists. I would look God in the eye and say "I want to be where they all are going. Any other eternity would just be too bland and boring."

I look forward to an exciting, vibrant, and diverse eternity with all of you!

Alleluia!



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Feelin' Good

April 19, 2009

READINGS

26And 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 fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

From Swedenborg:

Genesis 1:1. In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.

The word beginning is being used for the very earliest times. The prophets frequently call them "the days of old."²⁶

"The beginning" includes the first period of regeneration too, as that is when people are being born anew and receiving life. Because of this, regeneration itself is called our new creation [2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15]. Almost everywhere in the prophetic books, the words creating, forming, and making stand for regenerating, though with differences.²⁷

Secrets of Heaven, 16

In every final form there are distinct levels in simultaneous arrangement. This is the arrangement of the motor fibers in every muscle, the fibers in every nerve, the fibers and tiny vessels in all our viscera and organs. At the heart of each are the simplest and most perfect substances, while the outside is formed from their compounds.

The same arrangement of these levels is found in every seed, every fruit, even in every metal and rock. This is the nature of the parts that constitute their totality. Their central, intermediate, and outermost parts are on these levels, and they themselves are successive compounds, aggregates, or masses of these simple components that are their primary substances and materials.

DLW, NCE 207

MESSAGE

He is risen.

Alleluia!

We celebrate the journey made by Jesus in his earthly body to become fully one with God. We celebrate the union of human and Divine. Jesus has shown us the path beyond separation; beyond division; beyond dualism.

We celebrate being part of the Divine Human; the God-man.

As Swedenborg wrote:

We can be quite certain, on the basis of all this and of many other things consistent with it (which it would take too long to include) that God is a person and that the created universe is an image of him. The overall totality offers a reflection of him, just as specific aspects offer reflections of us. DLW 65

Divinity is the same in the largest and smallest of things.”
Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, #77

The inner person is a miniature heaven and the outer person a miniature world – a microcosm.
Swedenborg, *Heavenly Secrets*, #6057

Rev. Dr. George Dole has pointed out that when the whole is in each part, then we have a *hologram*, and that has profound implications for how we live upon the earth. Rev. Dole wrote, “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.”

This is an astounding statement of existence:

The same arrangement of these levels is found in every seed, every fruit, even in every metal and rock. This is the nature of the parts that constitute their totality.

The late Rev. Dr. Bob Kirven was a scholar in the history of ideas. I cherish his book *A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology*. In the section on Creation, he writes:

By gradual, stepless stages on a continuum, the outer is differentiated from - but at the same time connected to -- the inner. Even the lowest, most particular reality [each sparrow, each individual hair on your head], may be radically and distinctly less real

than its spiritual correspondent or its primary source in God. However, its external appearance is only relatively less real because it exists on an unbroken continuum with that same spiritual correspondent and even the Divine itself.

Stop a minute. Read [or reread] Divine Love and Wisdom #179-212 ... that may be the most sophisticated and comprehensive idea in the history of ideas. It provides one encompassing structure of reality that differentiates all reality into its distinct parts and levels, and at the same time interrelates all reality into the single whole that stems from the oneness of its creator. [p. 187]

This is both extremely complex and amazingly simple at the same time. It is the same Love and Wisdom that flows into everything that exists. The farther one gets from the Source, the less intense the energy is. Yet, this energy is in EVERYTHING.

We can become so comfortable with Swedenborg's approach to reality, that we can forget how intensely radical it is.

The same arrangement of these levels is found in every seed, every fruit, even in every metal and rock. This is the nature of the parts that constitute their totality. [DLW, # 207]

I live in Maine, where the seasons show us this reality. Trees and grass and flowers have appeared dead for months, covered under layers of snow. Now they bloom and sun shines.

In the harsh Northeast, we live for months in a world where much of nature appears dead. Then in the spring -- around the time of Easter - all is in bloom and aglow with the rays of the sun.

Swedenborg often uses the sun as an illustration of how the Divine shines upon and flows into everything upon the earth. Stand in the sun, and feel its warmth. Then look around at the other people in your area; they all receive the same rays. Notice the plants around you; they all receive the same warmth and light.

Go touch a rock that is in the sun. Why is it warm? The sun's light shines on it, too.

Of course, we get away from the intensity of the sun by sitting in the shade or going into a building. That lowers the intensity of the sun's rays. But you can't stop the sun from shining. Even in the winter, in the rain, in the floods -- the sun exists and send down its rays.

In the same way, we cannot escape God's love flowing into us. We can see it flow into everything that exists. It can be stronger in some places; weaker in other places.

But, always, it exists.

God always exists.

Inflow always flows.

Easter reminds us every year that humanity and divinity are united into oneness. We are all part of a universal web of existence that is united by the inflow of God's love into everything at every moment.

Take some time this week for a walk. Look at everything your eyes can see: people, animals, plants, minerals. Nothing can exist without receiving some energy from the sun. All of creation is united as part of God's everflowing love. You and God are forever united as a Divine human. Feel your connections with the animals, with the grass, with the rocks and the ocean.

Alleluia.

He is risen.

All Things Bright and Beautiful

April 26, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

9Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9.

And the earth produced the tender plant, and plant bearing its seed in the way of its kind, and the tree making the fruit that held its seed in the way of its kind, and the tree making the fruit that held its seed in the way of its kind, and God saw that it was good. Gen. 1:12

From Swedenborg

The third stage is one of repentance. During this time, at the prompting of the inner, we speak devoutly and reverently and yield a good harvest [acts of neighborly kindness, for instance]. These effects are lifeless none the less, since we suppose that they come of our own doing. They are called the tender plant, then the seed-bearing plant, and lastly the fruit tree.

And
From A.A

Step 4: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

MESSAGE

One of my favorite Bible stories is of Paul on the road to Damascus. One of my favorite movies is "Changing Lanes." Since this is the 2nd Sunday of Easter, and 'Changing Lanes' is our movie of the month, it seems like an ideal time to reflect on both.

We are continuing to explore Swedenborg's 3rd step of regeneration [and the 3rd day of

creation] as we find ourselves at the 4th step of A.A. Next week we are into May with its 5th step and Swedenborg's fourth stage. So today is the day to talk BOTH about my favorite Bible passage and my favorite movie!

Both the story of Paul and the movie are about profound and utter "turning around" of one's life. Transformation. In Paul's situation, his conversion was sudden and dramatic. While on the road to persecute Christians, he saw a great light, fell to the ground, and heard a great voice asking, "Saul; why do you persecute me?" Saul was transformed into Paul; a strong and faithful servant of the Lord's. It happened in an instant. This form of repentance is probably the fastest possible!

For most of us, our transformation is a long process taking weeks, months, and years. In the movie, *Changing Lanes*, the change in life is not instantaneous, like for Paul. But it doesn't take weeks or years. It happens in one day.

That day just happens to be Good Friday. It is a day in which one man, Gavin Banke [played by Ben Affleck] is racing to court to file an important paper that would bring in millions of dollars to his law firm. It is also a fraudulent piece of paper. The other man, Doyle Gipson [played by Samuel L. Jackson] is racing to family court to fight for custody of his two sons.

As fate – and the movie plot would have it – the two men collide on a busy street of New York. In the ensuing confusion, Gavin has accidentally left his important paper with Doyle. He races off, leaving Doyle by the side of the road with a disabled vehicle. By the time Doyle gets to court, he has lost custody of his sons. Gavin, facing a judge, tries to explain why he lost this crucial document. He spends the rest of the day trying to get it back from Doyle. He hires a man to ruin Doyle's financial standing. Doyle becomes increasingly determined to destroy the document.

During the rest of the day, their lives are change forever. The way things unfold in their lives this Good Friday can only be the work of Divine Providence. Although fiction, it is a "fast track" version of how things happen to transform us in our own lives. It reminds us of how God has created "all things bright and beautiful" in the day; even the things that at first seem to be tragedies.

The entire movie can be seen in ten segments on U-Tube. I've summarized the beginning of the movie for you, and now invite you to watch segments #5 and #6. Here you can see God at work, as these men are faced with the most challenging moral struggle of their lives.

I will also post the end of the movie, #10, which shows the final stage of transformation and how their lives have changes. WARNING; SPOILER! Because this is the end of the movie, you might want to skip it. Or maybe just watch it all now! Get the popcorn ready ...

[if you want to see the entire movie, go to [this link](#). It is Part I. After you watch it, you'll see Part II available, and so on, through the 10 sections.

I'll begin in the middle of the day, with the Lord hard at work in the lives of these 2 men:

CHANGING LANES, Part V:

At the beginning of Part V, you see how Banek is attempting to destroy Doyle's credit rating. By the end of this section, Doyle is reflecting on the number of things he has done in one day of questionable ethics.

Changing Lanes, Part VI

In this segment, we see Banek at dinner with his wife, where the moral choices are clear. How will he resolve them? If you want to know now, here is the final segment:

Changing Lanes: Conclusion

How is God at work in your life today to bring about transformation? Be aware of all things -- bright and beautiful -- in your life today.

A Contemplative Community

May 3, 2009

READINGS

from the Bible

psalm 139

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,

I will 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 your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

from Swedenborg

Spiritual Experiences-Word Explained (Odhner) n. 10

10. 1148. The Messiah works directly into the human soul - this is an unchanging truth. For the soul is the soil into which Divine light streams. Relative to the soul, this is higher than heavenly light. But into their minds, He works indirectly through spirits. In the children of His Church, however, such as Abraham, He works through love, which likewise streams in through the soul; but in others He works only through higher than heavenly light, enabling the mind to be spiritual and to contemplate heaven, and to lift itself up toward heaven. So the Messiah guides the rest of his children by means of light alone. What the difference is may be seen from the corresponding effects of light and of heat in the world.

MESSAGE

I was both excited and nervous as I arrived in Maryland in February of 2000 for a program of the [Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation](#). I was in their "Spiritual Guidance Program" to learn how to support others on their spiritual journeys. We had

two residencies of ten days each during our two years. As I arrived for our first one, I was especially eager to meet [Jerry May](#) – a psychiatrist who became a spiritual director and had helped found the Shalem Institute. I had read and loved many of his books. I felt at ease the first evening when we met our other residents and the staff. I was especially delighted to see the warmth and humor in Jerry.

In Jerry's teaching segments, he talked with us about the difference between *meditation* and *contemplation*. He said that in the Christian contemplative tradition, meditation involved practices we chose to do, and undertook with our own effort. [At one time, he said, meditation meant primarily thinking and reflecting – esp. on scripture.] Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were particularly instrumental in recognizing *contemplation* as an experience that cannot be planned or prepared for. It is a simple being in the moment. I had trouble grasping what he meant at first. He said that it was with John of the Cross that we really came to understand that the pathway from meditation to contemplation was the dark night of the soul.

My ears really perked up at that, and I had many questions about the dark night of the soul. Yet, Jerry wouldn't go there yet, saying we would focus on the dark night of the soul the following year in our 2nd residency.

As we departed at the end of the ten days, I felt very close to Jerry and the others. As I took my leaving, I looked Jerry in the eye and said, "I am a little nervous about the 2nd residency where we face the dark night of the soul. I'm so glad you will be there to guide us through it!" He laughed heartily, and reassured me that he would certainly be there to guide us through the dark night in next year's residency.

Sadly, Jerry wasn't around too many years after that; dying in 2005 after a long struggle with cancer.

I am so grateful that I did have Jerry's guidance through the dark night. I learned from him that Teresa and John had understood its meaning and importance. Yet, the dark night has been greatly misunderstood and maligned throughout Christian history.

I came to deeply value and honor the importance of this *dark night* in spiritual life.

It is that which frees us from the past, so that we can come to experience God more fully.

Jerry referred to John saying that the dark night usually comes to someone who has worked spiritual disciplines for a long time, and has a deep, satisfying experience with spiritual tools. But then, it seems that these same disciplines no longer bring peace and satisfaction: they are empty.

In fact, the person has no desire to continue to do them. Jerry said spiritual directors must be careful not to push someone back into their old forms.

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

The 3rd sign is that one just wants to "hang out" with God without any particular format or plan.

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

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

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

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

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

Swedenborgian communities are usually great places to develop contemplative spirituality. We can honor and support most all ways of finding connection with God.

We weren't given much in the way of specific spiritual practices by Swedenborg. Yet, most of our communities support individuals in a wide array of practices from many world traditions. We also support people who do not want to have a regular practice; or whose practice has lost meaning to them.

We can support people in the dark night of the soul, and in the contemplative life that follows.

We value whatever one's immediate relationship with God is. And we always bring the meaning of that relationship back to living our each day with love.

In that way a community becomes contemplative. It can be in the moment with each person; honoring and supporting their spiritual needs in that moment. And always inviting each other to look at how we actually live out each day in our lives, as the most important part of our relationship with God.

What are some of the ways you have seen and experienced that kind of support in a spiritual community? How could we support each other better in this community?

Mothering

May 10, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

- 1 O lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
- 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.
- 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
- 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.
- 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
- 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
- 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
- 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
- 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
- 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.
- 13 For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.
- 15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
- 16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.
- 17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!
- 18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.
- 18 If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.
- 19 Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.
- 20 For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
- 21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
- 22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.
- 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
- 24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

From Swedenborg

His mother was standing by Jesus' cross; and Jesus, seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing by, says to his mother, Lady, here is your son; and he says to the disciple, Here is your mother. So from that hour the disciple took her as his own mother.

John 19:25-27.

This passage means that the Lord did not recognise Mary as His mother, but the church; so He called her 'Lady' and the disciple's mother. The reason why she was called the mother of this disciple, that is, of John, is that he represented the church as regards the good deeds of charity; these are the church in its real action. That too is the reason why he took her as his own mother. It can be seen in THE APOCALYPSE REVEALED (5, 6, 790, 798, 879) that Peter represented truth and faith, James charity and John the works of charity; and the twelve disciples together represented the church in all respects (233, 790, 903, 915).

* Elsewhere, as AC 5886:2, TCR 306, this verse is quoted as 'whom I have sent away.' C.L. 119

MESSAGE "Being Mothered"

I was in my forties when my mother passed away; yet I had never felt so alone in the world. No longer was there someone to ask when I had had the chicken pox, or when I had learned to ride a bike. I knew I would see her again someday; but there was no one on the earth with me now who had those pieces of my past.

Losing my human mother weakened my connection with Mother Earth in some way. I didn't feel quite as nurtured, as known, as understood.

Today we honor all of our mothers: living on earth and in heaven; our biological mothers and all others who played a role in nurturing us. It is a day when I feel such gratitude to those who dedicate themselves to life's most precious calling: nurture the young.

There are mothers who nurture lovingly in the most dire of straits, and those who do so while also able to be present in the world in so many other roles.

Today, I'd especially like to honor Erin Brockovich. She is not a fictional character, but a real person by that name. She is an extraordinary mother. She not only cared for three young children without a partner or stable income; she also found time to stand up for Mother Earth. You may have seen the movie of that name that was released in 2000.

If someone made a movie based on your life, do you think it would become your favorite movie? For many of us, it would. However for Erin Brockovich, her favorite movie is Paying it Forward. She thinks more about sharing with others than of honoring herself. Erin wrote in her blog that the movie is 98% accurate about the events in her life. Take a look at the trailer to get a sense of what her life was like; or refresh your memory of the movie, if you would like.

Erin was born in Lawrence, Kansas, and had an Associate degree in Applied Arts. She then moved to Southern California where she worked at odd jobs; and entered and won

a beauty context. She got married and they had two children: Matthew and Katie. They were divorced. She re-married and they had a daughter: Elizabeth. Then, in 1990, she was divorced again. She was then a single mom with three children. She was injured in a traffic accident, but was awarded to money in compensation. She ended up working as a file clerk in the law office of the lawyer who had represented her.

She writes:

While organizing papers in a pro bono real estate case, I found medical records in the file that caught my eye. After getting permission from one of the firm's principals, Ed Masry, I began to research the matter. My investigation eventually established that the health of countless people who lived in and around Hinkley, California, in the 1960's, 70's and 80's had been severely compromised by exposure to toxic Chromium 6. The Chromium 6 had leaked into the groundwater from the nearby Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Compressor Station. In 1996, as a result of the largest direct action lawsuit of its kind, spearheaded by me and Ed Masry, the giant utility paid the largest toxic tort injury settlement in U.S. history: \$333 million in damages to more than 600 Hinkley residents.

Here is a video of the first part of the movie; about ten minutes. So often when we talk about Erin, we refer to her incredible efforts that brought some justice to many people who had been exposed to environmental toxins from a negligent company. That part of her life is an incredible – and true – story. But In these early minutes of the movie, we start to know Erin as a mother; first and foremost.

What are the spiritual themes for us today in this movie?

Erin Brockovich was an incredible mother to three young children. And she was an incredible daughter to Mother Earth. She began her crusade in 1991, when her children were ages 7, 6, and 1. Her ability to nurture became a wholistic theme throughout her life, as she fought to protect Mother Earth. This helps us appreciate that “mothering” is a verb. It is a verb that takes us to the core of what it means to live in the world with Love and Wisdom. It involves living in the world open to Divine Influx, and allowing oneself to be guided by it. It means living a life of “uses”: whether or not one has born and/or raised children.

Part of what is inspiring about her story is that it begins with a very ordinary and humble woman. Today, she is famous and is sought-after for environmental talks and consultations. Yet, when she started her crusade for Mother Earth, Erin was a single Mom at a low paying job who was barely making ends meet. I see a message in this for all of us. So often we say, “I’d like to make a difference, but I can’t because I don’t have the time, the resources, or the status.” Yet we are called by God everyday of our lives to do loving actions. Most of them seem very small to us; but they can be enormous in God’s view of the world. Erin was simply clerking in a law office, and feeling confused about the filing system. She had to figure it out. In doing so, she brought justice into the lives of many people.

She became involved in the most basic of all justice issues: our environment. Without Mother Earth, we would not be here to face all the other justice issues.

The Eco-Justice unit of the National Council of Churches sent out a story this week about another mother who is serving the environment:

Olivia James was a runway model for 16 years wearing full body make-up. When she decided to become pregnant she continued to get her nails done twice a week and her hair dyed. When her son D.J. was born, he arrived ten weeks early and he had a reproductive birth defect called hypospadias. After researching the cause, she found that a chemical in nail polish and fragrance is linked to reproductive birth defects in boys. She tells her story because she thinks it's important for this information to get out to others. A number of personal care products we use everyday like deodorant, shampoo, lipstick, and mascara contain chemicals linked to cancer, early puberty in girls, and reproductive birth defects in baby boys. These chemicals can also end up in our waterways and have been linked to the feminization of aquatic species. Women of child bearing age, infants, and children are also particularly vulnerable. On average women use twelve products and men use six products everyday. A typical teenage girl in the U.S. wears on average 16 personal care products a day. In these products are a number of chemicals. This is a concern because ingredients in personal care products go virtually unregulated by the Food and Drug Administration! Take this opportunity to honor Olivia's courage and all mothers by educating your members of Congress about harmful chemicals in personal care products. [Click here](#)

When I was teaching at the Swedenborg School of Religion, I met many extraordinary people. One of them was a student who was a single Mom who was going to seminary full-time while also working for environmental change. I asked her for a comment, and here are her words. They are from Rev. Nadine Cotton:

As a mother, I felt it was very important to expose my children to God's incredible handiwork in nature by spending time with them outdoors, camping, and taking the time to admire the song of a bird or the antics of a squirrel. The more time and exposure they had to our natural environment, the more enthusiastic they became about our Mother Earth and her many gifts to us. I also went out of my way to recycle, reduce and reuse whenever I could, so I could model for them ways that each one of us can help with the environment. I am pleased that they have both turned into caring adults who love to spend time in nature and are doing what they can to be responsible to our Mother Earth.

So we can learn many things from the life of Erin Brockovich on this Mothers Day, about what it means to “mother.” It is a verb that encompasses our relationship to our planet and to each other; whether or not we are raising or have raised children. When we get confused about what it is to “mother”, we can look at the most profound of all “mothering” == from a God who is total Love and Wisdom and nurture. Find some time to relax, and open your heart to the experience of being surrounded by Divine mothering, as loving inflow if forever pouring into us.

Secrets of Healing

May 17, 2009

FROM THE BIBLE

Luke 6:18-20 (New International Version)

18who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil[a] spirits were cured, 19and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

*20Looking at his disciples, he said:
"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.*

FROM SWEDENBORG

Divine Providence (Dole) n. 282

282. The Lord could heal everyone's discernment and make us incapable of thinking evil, capable only of thinking good. He could do this by various fears, by miracles, by messages from the dead, and by visions and dreams. However, healing only our discernment is healing us only superficially. Our discernment and its thought processes are the outside of our life, while our volition and its desire is the inside of our life. This means that healing only our discernment would be curing nothing but the symptoms. The deeper malignance, closed in and with no way out, would first devour what was nearest to it and then what was farther away until finally everything was dying. It is our volition itself that needs to be healed, not by our discernment flowing into it but by being taught and encouraged by our discernment.

If our discernment alone were healed we would be like an embalmed body or a corpse bathed in fragrant perfumes and roses. Before long the perfumes would draw forth from the body such a stench that none of us could put our nose anywhere near it. That is what it would be like for heavenly truths in our discernment if the evil love of our volition were repressed.

MESSAGE

Healing Secrets

I want to tell you the true story of a Methodist minister who became a Swedenborgian. It was 1856, in New Hampshire. The man, Warren Felt Evans, was becoming bored with church literature and a prayer style that was always spoken. He was reading the works of various mystics, and turned to prayer to understand his

spiritual quest. He began praying to be led to *some book or books which would satisfy this inmost need*. Of course, one must be careful what one prays for! He then felt guided to a bookshop in Portsmouth where he saw a book by mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. He began reading Swedenborg with great enthusiasm. His theology would never again be the same.



His health, which had never been good, began to worsen. He had to suspend his parish work, and by 1859 had not been preaching for 6 months. He turned to the writings of Swedenborg to gain a new perspective on healing; one that looks beyond the body to the soul. What he read gave him a sense of deep, inner peace. He knew that his deepest self was spirit, receiving constant love from the Divine. Yet, he couldn't translate that concept into techniques to help himself heal.

Warren Felt Evans 1817 - 1889

In 1863 he decided to visit a healer in Portland, Maine, whose fame was spreading throughout New England. The healer was Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Evans made two trips to Quimby, and was healed of dyspepsia, which had afflicted him for years. He was thrilled at what he found in Quimby: someone who put into practice Swedenborg's approach to healing. Evans felt that because of his Swedenborgian background he understood Quimby's healing secrets, and could employ them himself. Quimby agreed as Evans began the life of a healer.

The Methodist church was not pleased with Rev. Evans. The next year, Evans was re-baptized at the Swedenborgian Church on Beacon Hill. He and his family moved to Boston and then Salisbury, where he became a highly-effective healer. For the rest of his life, he gave healings, using Quimby's approach. . He never charged.

He wrote many books combining the theology of Swedenborg with the healing techniques of Quimby. Many consider Evans to be the start of what is called the New Thought movement. It was through the writings of Evans that many came to learn about Quimby's approach to healing, and the New Thought movement took off into Christian Science, Unity, Religious Science and others. The Swedenborgians were suspicious of Quimby, and never really embraced his approach to wellness. Quimby's ideas were developed by the New Thought Movement which went in some different directions from

Swedenborg; and many would say of Quimby.



Who was this Quimby?

He was born in the town of Lebanon, N. H., February 16, 1802. When about two years of age, his parents moved the family to Belfast, ME. His father was a blacksmith, and had seven children. He only attended school for a short time, and learned much later in life from reading on his own.

Phineas Parkhurst Quimby 1802 - 1866

When he became old enough to go to work, he learned the trade of watch and clock making, and for many years after engaged in that pursuit.

One day Quimby attended a lecture in Belfast on a new concept sweeping Europe and the states: "mesmerism." It was based on the idea of animal magnetism, involving a kind of electricity. It was believed that using this magnetism, one mind could control another. It evolved into hypnotism.

Quimby was excited by this new concept, and was actively involved in using hypnotic states to heal. While engaged in his mesmeric experiments, Mr. Quimby became more and more convinced that disease was an error of the mind, and not a real thing. On this assumption, he began to facilitate miraculous cures in people around him.

In the year 1859, Mr. Quimby rented a room in Portland at the International House Hotel on Exchange St., where he remained until the summer of 1865, treating the sick by his method. His waiting room would fill up with people waiting to see him, and he often came out and chatted about his theories



One of his most famous patients was Mary M. Patterson. She later became "Mary Baker Eddy" and started Christian Science.

Mary Baker Eddy 1821 - 1910

Julius Dresser and Annetta Seabury met in Quimby's waiting room. They fell in love, got married, and eventually began teaching Quimby's techniques in Boston at the Metaphysical Club. They are well known as early pioneers in the "New Thought" movement. They believed that Mary Baker Eddy had taken much of her theology from Quimby without acknowledging it.

Two of their children were ordained Swedenborgian ministers. Paul Dresser served in Maine. Horatio Dresser had only one year in the parish -- in Portland, ME. -- before he left to return to writing. [we are still trying to figure out what we did that pushed him away!]

Back to Quimby: The last five years of his life were exceptionally hard. He was overcrowded with patients, and greatly overworked, and could not seem to find an opportunity for relaxation.

His death occurred January 16, 1866, at his residence in Belfast, at the age of sixty-four

Horatio Dresser was eager to publish Quimby's writings. Finally, George -- son of Phineus -- released them to Horatio. The first edition of *The Quimby Manuscripts* was edited by Dresser.



So what were these secrets of Quimby's? Well, we can only guess at how he healed by the notes he left, and the things people he healed wrote about. Here is a summary of the points that seem to be emphasized:

Horatio Dresser 1866 - 1954

Jesus as model

In Quimby's work, emulating Jesus was fundamental and central. Evans wrote: *Jesus thus imparted to the sick and wretched the calm happiness of his own loving and gentle heart. . . . In this way Christ carried his healing power into the realm of spiritual causes. He addressed himself as a spirit to the spirit of the patient."*

Self as inner wisdom

Quimby was certain that the primary self was created by Wisdom.

Quiet: silent impressions

His patients tell us that Quimby had remarkable insight into the character of the sick. He judged character by silent impressions gained as he opened his mind open to discern the real life and "see it whole."

Rapport.

Rapport with the patient was an crucial; connection spirit to spirit.

Absent

No less important was Quimby's power of "absenting" himself, as he called it, from the patient's concept of his disease. Quimby saw the patient as whole and healed.

Conversation

He was convinced that illness and suffering are an error of mind. He would take time to explain this to the patient, explaining the causes of the ailment [the wrong thinking], and show the patient the truth. [seeing oneself as whole.]

How similar to is Quimby to Swedenborg? Well, one person who had a lot of say on the subject was Evans -- who became Swedenborgian shortly before his Quimby healing. His first book, *The Mental Cure*, used Swedenborg as the theological basis for Quimby's healing. In later years, he distanced himself from Swedenborg, and presented the healing concepts differently for Horatio Dresser was an important historian of the New Thought Movement. Given that he was a Swedenborgian minister and also the child of New Thought parents, he combined the two. He wrote that Evan's early writings were very Swedenborgian. But Evans ended up closer to a "new thought" perspective and farther from Swedenborg.

Horatio wrote this about the Mental Cure:

But Evans always shows the superiority of the love-element, the divine influx into the

heart. The right directing of the will seems to him more important than the use of such an affirmation as "I am strong." For he sees clearly that the disease springs from the inner life in general, not from mere belief; hence the cure must touch the whole spirit. To address oneself as a spirit to the spirit of the patient is indeed to rise to our highest privilege as a human being.

But of his later writings:

"to think and exist are one and the same" which has had great influence in the mental-healing movement. We here find Mr. Evans saying less about the larger view of man's spiritual nature, with its emphasis on will and the prevailing love or affection, and employing the terms which his later studies in idealism led him to adopt. Probably he did not intend to give up the spiritual in favor of the intellectual view...

Horatio believed that Evans played an important role in leading the New Thought Movement away from Swedenborg's spiritual base. He felt New Thought became all about one's thinking, with little discussion of God.

What can we use today? What if we combine Swedenborgian theology with Quimby methods, as Evans initially did? We might emphasize these points in our healing:

The starting-point, always should be with the inner man, the spirit or soul.

This was very meaningful to Helen Keller. The more we identify with the soul-level spiritual self, the more we can overcome infirmities of the body.

Cure involves regeneration. A physical cure involves our emotional and spiritual work of regeneration.

Be cautious of trying to heal by thought alone.

Horatio complained about the later Evans: *But he speaks of the mind of the patient as a "clean slate on which our thoughts may be written," and says that what "we imagine, and believe, and think, will be transferred" to the patient; and so he tends to give prominence to the intellectual factors of the silent treatment. It would be easy for the superficial reader to seize upon "thought" as the dominant factor and overlook the spiritual meanings which Mr. Evans had previously given to the term.*

To overly-focus on the "thought" could lead to blaming the patient for their illness because their thinking was wrong.

Keep focus on God.

I suspect that Quimby had healing secrets; but did not alone have all the answers. I think that Swedenborg's theology adds a crucial dimension to all of this.

I think God is still teaching us about healing. Let's learn from Quimby and other healers of the past and present. Yet, let's keep taking what we learn into our own inner

How Do You Water Your Garden?

May 24, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible and from Swedenborg

Secrets of Heaven, #27-28. NCE

Genesis 1:9. And God said, "Let the waters under heaven be gathered into one place, and let dry land appear"; and so it was done.

When we learn that we have an inner self and an outer, and that truth and goodness come from the inner self—or rather from the Lord by way of the inner self into the outer, even though this is contrary to appearances—this information, this knowledge of truth and goodness, is stored away in our memory. The knowledge takes its place among the secular facts we have learned, because anything instilled in our outward memory, whether earthly, spiritual, or heavenly, lodges there as a fact, and from there the Lord draws on it.

This knowledge is the waters gathered into one place and named seas. The outer being itself, on the other hand, is called dry land. Immediately afterward it is called earth, as the next verse shows.

Genesis 1:10. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of waters he called seas; and God saw that it was good.

To find waters symbolizing religious and secular knowledge, and seas symbolizing a body of such knowledge, is quite common in the Word. In Isaiah:

The earth will be full with the awareness of Jehovah, like the waters covering the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)

In the same prophet, where both kinds of knowledge are portrayed as lacking:

The water will disappear from the sea, the river will drain away and dry up, and the streams will recede. (Isaiah 19:5, 6)

In Haggai, where a new church is the subject:

I am shaking the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, and those who are the desire of every nation will come, and I will fill this House⁴⁷ with glory. (Haggai 2:6, 7)

And in Zechariah, on the regenerating

And in Zechariah, on the regenerating individual:

That will be a single day; it is known to Jehovah; it is not day or night. And it will happen that at the time of evening there will be light. And it will happen on that day that living water will go out from Jerusalem,

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part of it to the eastern sea and part of it to the western sea.⁴⁸
(Zechariah 14:7, 8)

In a passage in David depicting a devastated person who is being reborn and will come to revere the Lord:

Jehovah does not despise his prisoners; the heavens and the earth, the seas and every creeping thing in them will praise him. (Psalms 69:33, 34)

In the following passage in Zechariah, the earth symbolizes that which receives something put into it:

Jehovah is stretching out the heavens and founding the earth and forming the human spirit in the middle of it. (Zechariah 12:1)

MESSAGE

I'll never forget Memorial Day of 1980. My husband and I were finally purchasing a home! It was in rural New Hampshire, and there was lots of room for a garden. I was so excited! I so wanted to grow my own organic vegetables. The closing date on our home was just after Memorial Day, but the owners let me start planting on Memorial Day week-end. I had read that in my part of New Hampshire, Memorial Day was the point at which it was safe to plant heat-loving seeds and seedlings.

I had such a great time digging up the ground and putting my little seeds in. Then I had to water them, so they could start growing. I hadn't actually thought of that beforehand!

The house was far from the garden, so there was no hose. There was a stream near-by. So I got a bucket and began bringing buckets full of spring water to my little seeds. After a few trips, I was getting tired and there was hardly any water in the ground.

I noticed that the well was close to the garden! I remembered the well at my grandparents' house as a child. It had a neat handle that I could pump to get water. This well had no handle. It was covered with a cement top, and the water was pumped by electricity up to the house.

I thought maybe I could dig some trenches from the stream to the garden. I worked at that for awhile, and then realized that the land was too hilly for trenches to bring the water.

I looked up at the sky. Any chance of rain? It was my only remaining hope. The skies were bright and sunny.

Well, in the end, I went to a hardware store to buy a very long extension for a garden hose so that I could water that garden.

Today, I am blessed to live near a [C.S.A.](#), where I can support their efforts in growing organic vegetables.

I've thought about that Memorial Day in 1980 when I've read St. Teresa of Avila talking about prayer like a garden.



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

The first 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.

She saw two main forms of prayer: meditation and contemplation. The former is prayer that is intentional, and requires some effort.

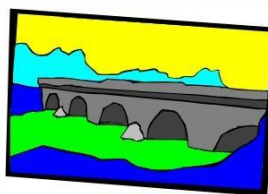
Contemplation is just a grace of God, and our only act is to receive it. Now imagine that God has presented you with a lovely plot of land in an arid area. The soil is tilled; God has planted the seeds. God has even removed all of the weeds.

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 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. They prayer takes more energy than we have.

How about a water wheel and an aqueduct?



THE PRAYER OF QUIET

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 recollected and comes upon something supernatural.

In no way can the soul acquire this prayer through any efforts it may make.

All that takes place here brings with it the greatest consolation and with so little labor that prayer does not tire one, even though it last for a long while.

The intellect's work here is very slow paced, and it obtains a lot more water than it pulled out of the well.

The tears God gives are now accompanied by joy.

There is no striving for them.

This water of great blessings and favors that the Lord gives here makes the virtues grow incomparably better than in the previous degree of prayer.

The soul is now ascending above its misery and receiving a little knowledge of the delights of glory. His Majesty is beginning to communicate Himself to this soul and He wants it to experience how He is doing so.

In arriving here it begins soon to lose its craving for earthly things.

It sees clearly that one moment of the enjoyment of glory cannot be experienced here below.

During the time of this prayer, everything is "yes".

The "no" comes afterward upon seeing that the delight is ended and that one cannot recover it.

God in His greatness desires that this soul understand that He is so close it no longer needs to send Him messengers but can speak with Him itself and not by shouting since He is so near that when it merely moves its lips, He understands it.

It seems it has found everything at once and doesn't know what it has found.

The Lord desires that the soul in this prayer almost see with its own eyes this particular grace.

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

He desires that the soul grow in the understanding of what this love accompanied by delight is.

For anyone who has experience, it is impossible not to understand soon that this little spark cannot be acquired.

If this quietude and recollection and little spark is 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 that I can express.

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

THE PRAYER OF INFUSION

The third way 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 out in the world and do good deeds – uses – for others. One combines Martha with Mary, so that one is “engaged in both the active and contemplative life together.

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

THE PRAYER OF UNION

In the fourth form of prayer, the gardener does nothing to water the ground. God sends the rains. It is “heavenly water” in great abundance; soaking the ground and saturating entire garden.

The soul is now in union with God.

“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 different times, and need to be open to whatever is right for us at a given time.

SWEDENBORG ON WATER

It makes sense that Teresa would use "water" as a way to help us understand prayer. Swedenborg, too, often talked about water. Here are some quotes from *Secrets of Heaven*:

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.

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.

2700. Verse 19. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the child drink. "God opened her eyes," signifies intelligence; "and she saw a well of water," signifies the Lord's Word from which are truths; "and she filled the bottle with water," signifies truths from the Word; "and she gave the child drink," signifies instruction in spiritual things.

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)

Carl Jung and St. Teresa of Avila

John Welch wrote a fascinating book about Carl Jung and Teresa as spiritual pilgrims on a similar path.

He said that water had a similar meaning to Jung as it did to Teresa.

Here are notes taken during one of Jung's lectures:

Whenever water appears, it is usually the water of life, meaning a medium through which one is reborn. It symbolizes a sort of baptism ceremony or initiation; a healing bath that gives resurrection or rebirth.

[page 61.]

For Jung, water conveyed the depth of human richness and depth within our deepest being. For Swedenborg, it was about truth. Teresa used it as a way of explaining prayer to us.

How do you water your garden of prayer?

Our closing song is quiet music about a garden. Memorial Day is a time to remember those who have died -- in war or in dimension of our lives. Give yourself a moment to remember and to reflect

The Holy Spirit Goes to the Movies

May 31, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

John 20 (King James Version)

1The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.

2Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

3Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

4So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

5And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

6Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

7And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

8Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

9For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

10Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

12And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him.

14And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

17Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

18Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

19Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the LORD.

21Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained

FROM SWEDENBORG:

Spiritual Experiences (Buss) n. 481

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

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

MESSAGE

When there is 5th Sunday in a month – such as today – I like to use the opportunity to explore in more depth the spiritual themes of the Movie of the Month.

This month's movie is *Erin Brockovich*; chosen for Mother's Day.

Yet I could not ignore that in the Common Lectionary many Christian Churches use; today is "Pentecost Sunday;" the time when the apostles began to speak in tongues when the Holy Spirit arrived like a great wind. So today's theme seemed clear: "The Holy Spirit in *Erin Brockovich*." The lectionary movie concordance listed a number of movies under the theme of "holy Spirit" and pointed out that "breath" or "wind" is often used in movies to show times when Holy Spirit is at work. The concordance suggested *The Music Man* and *Wizard of Oz* as examples. I downloaded *The Music Man* from Netflix and watched it again; but I could not find see any wind or particularly significant breathing except for the blowing of the 76 trombones! The *Wizard of Oz* wasn't available for download, but I remembered the story

of the tornado that carried Dorothy and her friends to Oz. Whether or not that was “holy spirit” ... who is to say?

So perhaps today’s theme should be: “The Holy Spirit in *Erin Brockovich* and the *Wizard of Oz*.” To fully understand the meaning of the *Brockovich* movie, I needed to learn more about the real *Erin Brockovich*. I had hoped to learn something of her sense of spirituality. I could only find one piece of information: Her favorite movie is not *Erin Brockovich* but *Pay It Forward*.

So, to fully understand her, I needed to understand more about this movie. It was not available from Netflix for instant download, but I had seen it some years ago. Where did that movie theme come from?

From a novel, *Pay it Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde. So to understand *Erin Brokovich*, I needed to understand the movie *Pay it Forward*, which could only be fully understood by reading the novel on which it was based. It was available as an instant e-book, so I stayed up late last night, unable to put the book down.

By now, the message was getting titled: “The Holy Spirit in *Erin Brokovich*, the *Wizard of Oz*, and *Pay it Forward*.” I decided to drop “The Wizard of Oz,” since I had no opinion on the role of Holy Spirit in the Kansas tornado that his Dorothy’s house. I decided on “*The Holy Spirit Goes to the Movies*” as a pretty all-encompassing title!

I’d like to start with a brief over-view of Swedenborg’s concept of *Holy Spirit*, and then take those ideas into our movies and book. You might want to start the popcorn now, as you could be spending the rest of the day watching movies!

Swedenborg’s view of Holy Spirit is one of the key elements that differentiate Swedenborgian Christianity from mainline Christianity.

Swedenborg rejects the tradition concept of “trinity” because God is one essence ... not three. The Lord is the one Divine being, who has three aspects:

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

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

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

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

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

That is not necessarily the Holy Spirit, but it does add an interesting dimension to the role of wind in music, art, and movies.

So, I started with Swedenborg's definition: *The Holy Spirit is the divine truth and also the divine action and effect that radiate from the one God.* It seemed to me that times in which we experience the Holy Spirit at work could be when we have a sudden grasp of the truth of a situation: a truth that leads us to action.

I thought that the *Erin Brockovich* movie had several such places. You probably know that Erin is a single Mom – with little formal education --who desperately needs a job. She ends up as a file clerk for a lawyer, as she becomes curious as to why medical records are filed in a real estate file. She asks for permission to investigate this further, and goes to visit one of the people in the file.

In that scene, the subject of “chromium” comes up in a conversation with the woman she visits. She leaves the house and seems to be in a thoughtful mood. [note how the wind is rustling the trees]. She then visits a professor, who distinguishes healthy from destructive chromium.

I see this is a crucial series of scenes where she learns a devastating truth – and begins to take the actions that made her famous.

But, of course, to understand more of what motivates the real Erin Brockovich we need to look more closely at *Pay it Forward*. The book -- and the movie – is the story of a social studies teacher in a junior high school who gives his class an extra-credit assignment: do something to change the world.

Trevor, the central character, comes up with the idea of “pay it forward.” He will do three good deeds for 3 different people. They will be something “big” that the person could not do for themselves. And the person is not to “pay back” Trevor for the good deed, but rather to do 3 big good deeds for other people – and ask them to do 3 such deeds for other ...

In time, everyone in the world will be doing good deeds for each other, over and over again. It doesn't seem to work that way for Trevor, however. He invites a homeless man to stay in his home – something Mom is not too pleased with. The man relapses on drugs and is put in jail and refuses to see Trevor when he comes to visit. He helps a woman beautify her garden, but she dies overnight, so doesn't seem available for 3 good deeds. At least not on earth. His third deed is to try and match up his Mom with his social studies teacher: a deed that neither Mom nor teacher seem to appreciate.

Trevor assumes that his social studies project is a failure, but he gets an “A” for effort. He is unaware that actually a whole movement of “pay it forward” is rapidly

spreading and a reporter is trying to track back how who started the movement. Here is the scene where he is given this assignment, and starts to grasp its possibilities:

I can see these same themes in *Erin Brockovich*. Erin lives her life with the intention of doing good for others, regardless of the consequences for herself. She is a devoted Mom, whose caring for her children shows throughout the movie. And she really cares about people. She gets involved in the project about how chromium has damaged many people. Unlike the lawyers later in the movie who are distant from their clients, Erin becomes part of the lives of the people who are their clients. She is by their side throughout the process of suing the company who knowingly dumped dangerous chromium in the environment. We see her tears and her laughter as her love for others motivates her actions every day.

I would call both of these stories to be examples of Holy Spirit – as truth and action. The true *Erin Brockovich* movie and the fictitious *Pay it Forward* novel and movie have many examples of people who reach a deep knowing of a truth that had eluded them. Out of that knowing, they shape the actions of their days and their lives. Sometimes, we even see wind or significant respiration in those moments!

It should be noted that the concept of “pay it forward” did not originate with the novel. It goes back at least to Robert Heinlein and then back to Benjamin Franklin. Of course, one could argue that actually it goes back at least to Jesus who gave a Golden Rule that exists in some form in all religions: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Swedenborg clarifies that doing good is its own reward. As we regenerate in our spirituality, we are not doing good for the sake of being paid back. We are doing it because we find that making others happy is the greatest joy we ourselves could have.

Throughout these stories, we see the power of Spirit [however you want to define that] in people’s lives by showing deeper truths, and showing them the true rewards of giving without being repaid personally; for the “paying it forward” is everyone’s reward.

Have you had any “Holy Spirit” moments in your life – where you came to grasp a deep truth that led you to new ways of acting?

Meeting Jesus at the Well

June 6, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE WORD:

John 4:7-26 (The Message)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM SWEDENBORG

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

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

MESSAGE

Meeting Jesus at the Well

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Jumping with a Parachute

June 14, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 7

Judging Others

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

New International Version (NIV)

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FROM SWEDENBORG

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 101

101. It is absolutely necessary to realize, though, that all correspondence with heaven is correspondence with the Lord's divine human, because heaven is from him and because he is heaven, as has been explained in the preceding chapters. For unless the divine human flowed into every bit of heaven and, in accord with correspondences, into every bit of our world, there would be no angels and none of us.

Again then, we can see from this why the Lord became an individual on earth and clothed his divine nature with a human nature from first to last. This happened because the divine human on which heaven depended before the Coming of the Lord was no longer adequate to sustain everything, since we, the foundation of heaven, had undermined and destroyed the design.

MESSAGE

Jumping with A Parachute

It was 1968 in San Francisco. An Episcopal priest was leading a discussion about local businesses. Someone commented that several people were bailing out of his organization. The priest jotted this question on the board: *What color is the parachute?* Everyone laughed. Perhaps they were thinking, *If you're going to jump from a plane -- or be pushed out -- it's really good to have a parachute; and to know*



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what color it is and where you packed it.

It wasn't long after that when this priest, Robert Bolles, lost his own job as canon pastor of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, due to a budget crunch. He ended up in an administrative position working with campus ministers around the country. He found that many of them lived in fear of losing their jobs, and many of them had already lost positions.

It seemed to Bolles that they tended to take the wrong approach to finding another job. The first inclination was usually to start answering ads or to start sending out one's resume. To Bolles, it made more sense to figure out what you really wanted, and then get out and talk to people – to establish networks.

He wrote up a little guide about this approach. For a title, he stuck on his question: *What Color is Your Parachute?* He self-published his guide in 1970. Now, in 2009, the book is more popular than ever, as people turn to it to cope with our tight economy.

I remember reading his book soon after it came out. Its approach was radical for the time: to let the central part of the job hunt emerge from one's interactions with other people.

One's journey with God is similar. Many people have satisfying spirituality by themselves. But to fully express one's essence requires interactions with other people: a community. Often, the best community for this journey is a "congregation," a group of people who worship together and walk life's journey together.

The spiritual road is a long and dusty one. There is an African proverb about why elephants walk in pairs on the dusty roads: to blow the dust out of each other's eyes.

This is what a congregation does for each other. To make a commitment to join a congregation is to blow a lot of dust around! It is being willing to blow the dust out of the eyes of others, and letting them blow away your own.

Jesus pointed out how often we focus on a speck in the eyes of another, but aren't aware of the beam in our own. A congregation helps us, out of love, see our own beams.

This is a crucial dimension of the spiritual journey. We have to see the fullness of who we are before God can help us come into the Divine-human union. In the 4th step of AA, we become aware of what we need to improve in ourselves. But to get from the 4th step to the 7th – where we let God remove our defects, we need a lot of community. We have to be able to share with another those parts of ourselves that we want to change, and we need loving support to let God transform us.

It is easy to start the journey. We can see a beautiful, glowing light down the road. Yet, the road has so many twists and turns that it's easy to get lost. And the path is so dusty that our eyes become blurry. None of us can know how God is leading someone down

this road. But we can blow away dust to help each other see that light that we're walking towards.

Most of us walk this road in the company of many other people. Joining a church is making a commitment to trod the road frequently with a particular group whose spirituality is rooted in a common tradition.

One of the things that are of surprise to many who first become involved in a faith community is to see how much disagreement and conflict are part of church life today. One's initial response can be: "What kind of church is this, where people disagree on so many things?"

Peter Steinke is a well-known Lutheran pastor and pastoral counselor who writes and teaches about healthy congregations. He says that a congregation is the body of Christ; it is a living organism, and it can function like a healthy body -- or we might say as the Divine human. He points out that health and disease are not opposites; but rather part of a unified wholeness.

Disease disrupts the body's balance. By doing so, disease provokes the healing capacities of the body to restore the very balance disease has disrupted. Many of the "symptoms" of disease are actually the body's healing resources at work [for example, higher body temperature kills germs. [Healthy Congregations, p. 8]

When we disagree, we can feel out of balance. Yet, conflict can be the fever that kills off germs; keeping us whole.

In the Portland New Church, we have adopted a Communication Covenant that honors and celebrates the differences in community, and provides standards of love and respect for exploring our conflicts.

A healthy congregation -- like a healthy family -- cannot thrive without open sharing and conflict. It is a way we keep blowing dust away for each other.

I am reminded of the story of a wise teacher in a community of students. There were many conflicts. One group came to the teacher to explain their position on an important controversy. The wise teacher responded, "Yes, you are right."

When the word of this got around, a group with an opposite position went to the teacher to explain their position. He responded, "Yes; you are right."

Then someone who didn't yet have a position came to the teacher. "Teacher, these two positions cannot BOTH be right, because they are opposites. If one is right, then the other must be wrong." The teacher responded: "Yes. You are right."

Just when you think you are soaring through life, you can get pushed out of your airplane. Our community can't stop those things from happening in your lives. But we do give you a parachute with our logo on it. When you're pushed out, all you have to do is open it, and you will land in our outstretched arms.

Fathers, Heroes, and Champs

June 21, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Galatians 4:6

⁶ And because we^[a] are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”^[b]

Footnotes:

- a. [Galatians 4:6](#) Greek *you*.
- b. [Galatians 4:6](#) *Abba* is an Aramaic term for “father.”

FROM SWEDENBORG

[2] The whole natural order also in every single part has reference to what is good and what is true. In it, that is, the natural order, the celestial and spiritual goods and truths that belong to heaven are represented, and in heaven Divine Goods and Truths that are the Lord's are represented. From this it becomes clear that good is like the father and truth is like the mother, and that therefore 'father' in the internal sense of the Word means good, and 'mother' truth. Indeed they mean the goodness and truth in which lower or derived goods and truths originate, which in relation to them are as daughters and sons, and are also consequently called daughters and sons in the Word, 489-491, 2362. They are also in relation to that good and truth as brothers and sisters, as grandchildren and great grandchildren, as sons-in-law, fathers-in-law, and daughters-in-law; in short they are as every degree of blood relationship and relationship by marriage. And all these relationships stem from the marriage of good, which is the father, to truth, which is the mother. For all things - every single one - in heaven exist as in blood relationships of love to and faith in the Lord, or what amounts to the same, of good and truth, see 685, 917, 2739, 3612, and the most ancient people therefore compared all these things to marriages, 54, 55. See also 718, 747, 1432, 2508, 2516, 2524, 2556. SH 3703

FATHERS, HEROES, AND CHAMPS

Erik Kernan's is a sports writer for a small newspaper. His relationship with his six-year-old son, Teddy, is the most important thing in his life. It is so important, that he dare not be the person he really is around Teddy. He must create a persona that Teddy



will be proud of. Kernan is ashamed of his own father, a well-known sports commentator who walked out on him when he was a child.



Kernan likes the person he has created for Teddy. He makes up stories about the famous people he knows, and about how successful he is at work.



Actually, Kernan's boss is quite disappointed in Kernan's work. It is nothing like that of his well-know father's. It is shallow and boring. The boss knows Kernan can do better and keeps pushing him in that direction. Kernan is not interested in becoming a better writer. He wants to be seen as a good writer – whether he is or not.

In a chance meeting, budding reporter Kernan (Hartnett) meets the Champ (Jackson,) currently the subject of ridicule and abuse in downtown Denver, Colorado. Having suffered various tragedies over recent months, like the death of his famed sports-radio father, the separation from his wife and loss of his son, and the humiliation of being "buried" deeper and deeper in the paper, Kernan sees this as an opportunity to tell the story of Battling Bob Satterfield as the Champ tells his story. [Hollywood Jesus](#)



Disaster strikes, threatening to ruin Kernan's career. His first reaction is to cover up the mistake. Then, he is faced with how Teddy would look at him for taking the coward's way out.

His discussion with Teddy about his mistakes, and the consequences that have

resulted, is heart-wrenching.

Kernan at this point does not know who he is. He has a lot of decisions to make to figure that out.

Are there times when you have not wanted to live life as the person you are, but rather as the person you would like to be? How do you become the person you want to be? Perhaps it just begins when you start accepting who you are now.

How well do you accept who you are?

What gets in the way of that acceptance?

What would help you come to like yourself?

There are no easy or simple answers to these questions. But at the end of the movie, we see Kernan attempting to find them.

Discussion of movie; some scenes

This is good movie for all of us. It helps us ponder questions of what “truth” is in our lives, and how important it is.

Throughout the whole movie, there's a conversation interloping and woven in the fabric of the movie about truth, as some people want it and some people don't care. The message of the movie is tied up in it, and acts of forgiveness and admission of guilt are required to uncover it. [Hollywood Jesus](#)

It helps us consider what it means to be what we are, rather than what we think people want us to be.

At the end of the day, who will you be? Will you sacrifice everything for glory, your family, friends, and faith to rise above the crowd? Or will you pursue truth so dearly, having faith in yourself and something greater than yourself, and realize that you've risen above the crowd through that pursuit? [Hollywood Jesus](#)

It is also a particularly good movie for Father's Day. It says a lot about fathers, and their relationship with their children. The primary characters in this movie are working through their relationships with their fathers, now deceased. Kiernan also struggles with how to be different than his own abandoning father had been.

How has your relationship with your own father impacted your life today? If you are a father, how does that impact your sense of self?

I've talked with many people who grew up with a concept of God as father , and also grew up with an abusive father. Many of these folks struggle with a belief that God is abusive. It can become a deeply-rooted assumption that deeply impacts their spirituality.

For some people, God as "father" is very reassuring. For others, it gets in the way of their spiritual journey. What is God for you? – father, mother, friend, beloved, spirit, companion Or:

What is particularly of intriguing about this movie is that it is based on a true story. It is about J.R, Meohringer, who struggled to adjust to the way his father abandoned him.

The real-life character does learn the truth about his subject during the meticulous research demanded by his editor. In the article, he struggles with facing the truth, as he moves in and out of reflections on his relationship with his father.

It is a great movie to watch with someone you love, and to ponder the question of who you really are. And what gets in the way of being fully that every day.

Prayer in Community

June 28, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

King James Version

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

³If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

⁶My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

⁷Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

⁸And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Apocalypse Explained (Tansley) n. 529

And I beheld, and I heard one angel flying in the midst of heaven.- That this signifies the Lord enlightening all in the heavens concerning the state of the church at its end, is evident from the signification of seeing and hearing, as denoting to open the understanding to perceive, concerning which we shall speak presently; and from the signification of angel, as denoting the Lord; that angels in the Word mean the Divine Truth proceeding from the Lord, thus the Lord Himself, as to Divine Truth, may be seen above (n. 130, 200, 302); here the Lord, as to revealing what the quality of the church would be in the last times as to the reception of the Divine Truth; and from the signification of flying, as denoting to enlighten and impart understanding, concerning which also we shall speak presently; and from the signification of "in the midst of heaven," as denoting in the whole heaven, or all who are in the heavens. That in the midst signifies in the whole, and thus all, may be seen above (n. 213). It is evident therefore, that, "I beheld, and I heard an angel flying in the midst of heaven," signifies the enlightenment of all in the heavens concerning the state of the church at its end.

Illustration concerning the state of the church is signified, because this is the subject treated of in what follows. The reason why seeing and hearing signify the opening of the understanding to perceive, is, that to see signifies to understand, and to hear signifies to perceive. That to see signifies to understand, may be seen above (n. 260); and that to hear signifies to perceive, may also be seen above (n. 14, 108).

MESSAGE

Prayer in Community

Greetings from Seattle:

I write this sermon in Seattle at our annual Swedenborgian convention. I have had a rich and meaningful week: worshipping, learning, playing, and praying with a couple hundred fellow Swedenborgians.

I'd like to reflect with you on my experience of prayer within community. A few weeks ago, I wrote a sermon about prayer from the perspective of St. Teresa of Avila. Her types of prayer are very moving for me, and have guided me for years.

Yet, during this past week, my prayer experiences have been in community rather than in private. Teresa writes about our personal relationship with God. I also connect with the Divine through my faith community.

Community prayer is also very much on my mind because our steering committee for www.swedenborgiancommunity.org is preparing an exciting new program for ways we can experience prayer within our on-line community.

Teresa's Prayer:

Teresa wrote statements that were quite bold for her time. She noted that most prayer was "vocal" -- often spoken out loud in church. In private, people often recited or read prayers; either out loud or in their heads. The Psalms and scripture were used frequently for prayer. Our scripture reading for today is Psalm 130; a deep and heartfelt prayer that has been read or recited for generations for prayer. It is used both in corporate worship as well as in private, personal prayer.

Teresa introduced us to the idea of a prayer beyond words. Prayer can grow out of simply being open to and living with God. In my daily life, I love to experience prayer this way.

Prayers in Silent Retreat:

Community prayers can also be private and personal -- yet shared with others. I'm reminded of retreats I have had at the Shalem Institute led by Tilden Edwards. We have been guided into a period of silence -- usually for 2 or 3 days. We are each deeply within our own relationship with God during this time. Yet we are also together. We start with community devotions together as we enter our silence. As silence begins, some of us go to the privacy of our rooms. Some stroll through the grounds or use the art materials together. Usually, I go to my room for awhile in complete privacy to find my connection with the Divine. Then, after some deep personal prayer, I notice that it is time for a meal. Quietly, I walk through the corridors to the cafeteria. As I walk, I pass others. We nod or smile. At first, I am startled. I have been immersed in private prayer, and now pass another person. My heart warms as I feel the companionship and support of another person during this time of personal prayer. I can pray alone AND with community simultaneously!

In everyday life, if I am praying while walking, and encounter another person, I speak with them; even if it disrupts my prayers.

Yet, here I need say nothing! We are all in prayer; alone and together. I can lower my eyes to the floor, and make no eye contact. Or I can smile. I can hug or hold hands. We communicate through our eyes and the movement of our bodies.

In the cafeteria, the only sound is that of cutlery on plates. I can eat with my eyes on my plate. Or I can share with others through my eyes and face.

It is glorious! I am deeply with God. And I am in community with others who are deeply with God. Each person there is helping to support my prayer time, and I am supporting theirs.

This is, for me, a way I can experience private prayer with community.

Prayers at Convention:

This week, I have encountered a rich variety of prayers. We have recited prayers together in worship. We have sung prayers and danced them. We have prayed together to consecrate the communion elements. We prayed to bless the ordination of two new ministers. We have prayed as a community for individuals -- both within and outside the community. We have prayed as community for the community and for the world. There have been times of silence to find the prayer-beyond-words in my heart.

Prayers at www.swedenborgiancommunity.org

The worship services I post -- such as this one -- always include a prayer in some form; often as blessing the end. On Sunday evenings, we gather for a "prayer service" in our sanctuary chat room. Many times, we "stand in a circle and hold hands." Uh -- that is -- *virtually* hold hands. We are each at our own computer, spread around the world. Yet we pray together. I experience warmth and love, knowing that we are praying together.

We post prayers and prayer requests.

We had an experience of "prayer partners" during Advent, where we each had a "secret" partner to pray for and who prayed for us. Many of us had deeply moving experiences during this time.

We will soon be exploring the use of prayer beads and prayer shawls. We will make known that we are a place to bring prayer requests and to pray.

Do you have ideas or requests for our unfolding prayer program? Email Susan at Prayer@swedenborgiancommunity.org.

Let us pray. "Dear God, please guide our path as we open our hearts to prayer with you."

The Two Lights

July 5, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

The following passage in Isaiah discusses the Lord's Coming and the light brought to the nations—in other words, a new church, and specifically the individuals who are in shadow but welcome the light and are being reborn. [Swedenborg's introduction to the passage]

Rise, shine, because your light has come! Look—shadows cover the earth, and darkness, the peoples. And Jehovah will dawn above you; and the nations will walk toward your light, and monarchs, toward the brightness of your rising. Jehovah will become an eternal light to you. No longer will your sun set, and your moon will not withdraw, because Jehovah will become an eternal light to you. (Isaiah 60:1, 2, 3, 19, 20)

Swedenborg Reading

In the fourth stage, love stirs and faith enlightens us. Before this time we may have spoken devoutly and yielded a good harvest, but we did so in a state of trial and anguish, not at the call of faith and kindness. In consequence, they are now kindled in our inner self, and are called the two lights. Secrets of Heaven, #10

From Genesis I:

¹⁴And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

¹⁵And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

¹⁶And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

Song

Light of a Million Morning



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Love, Spirit, Life

Regine Velasque

¹⁷And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

¹⁸And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

¹⁹And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Song

Here Comes the Sun

Nina Simone

From Swedenborg

[3] Love and faith work the same way in our inner being as warmth and light work in our outer flesh and are therefore represented by warmth and light. This is why the lights are said to be placed in the expanse of the heavens, or our inner being, the greater light in our will and the smaller in our intellect.⁵¹ But they only seem to be present there, just as the light of the sun only appears to be in physical objects. It is the Lord's mercy alone that stirs our will with love and our intellect with truth or faith.

Song

I Saw the Light

32 Love and faith are first called the great lights, then love is called the greater light and faith the smaller light. It says that love will rule during the day and that faith will rule during the night

Reflection

Sun? Did someone mention sun? Like in sun shine and warmth? Maine has seen very little sunshine in the past few weeks. We are experiencing rain ... rain ... and more rain.

It seems unfair somehow. We have sooo much winter every year! We count the days until summer. Now, here they are; bringing rain.

Yet, Swedenborg says:

Love and faith work the same way in our inner being as warmth and light work in our outer flesh and are therefore represented by warmth and light.

So, even when there is no sun in the sky, I can find love and faith inside of myself. They bring

warmth and light to the inner me.

SONG

There is Sunshine in my Soul

Our closing prayer is a meditation to allow the sun to rise in our soul.

Sunrise Meditation

The Lesser Light

July 12, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1:14, 15, 16, 17. *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to make a distinction between day and night; and they will act as signals and will be used for seasons for both the days and the years. And they will be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth," and so it was done. And God made two great lights: the greater light to rule by day and the smaller light to rule by night; and the stars. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth.*

From Swedenborg

32 *Love and faith are first called the great lights, then love is called the greater light and faith the smaller light.*

Now, goodwill and faith are two distinct things, yet they become one in us and make us people of the church—they cause the church to exist within us.

TC 336

MESSAGE

The Lesser Light: The Faith Journey

Paul Edgecomb, a fictional character created by Stephen King, was a prison guard in Louisiana in the 1930's. He worked on death row, where he was with prisoners in the last part of their lives and during their death in the electric chair. He was a man who tried to live a decent life. Despite working in a rough environment with brutal people, he tried to treat everyone with respect – even the prisoners. He cared about his co-workers and their families, and loved his wife very much.

During the early part of the movie, *The Green Mile*, we see that Paul's major problem is his health. He suffers from an excruciatingly painful bladder infection. Despite, he comes to work every day and does his job.

Then a new prisoner is brought to death row; a huge black man named *John Coffey*. Coffey was found guilty of raping and killing two young girls. Despite the vicious nature of this crime, Coffey is quiet and gentle, and he and Paul develop a rapport. One day, a new prisoner tries to escape, and Paul gets hurt in a scuffle. He is hit in his groin, and falls to the ground with intense pain. The other guards take another injured



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man to the infirmary, and Paul is left to guard. What follows below shows what happens next: [watch to point 5 minutes and 25 seconds.]

Paul then sees Coffey perform another miracle. In this clip, a mean guard purposely steps on and kills mouse, who is pet to one of the prisoners. Watch up to minute #3:00

In this clip, we see how much Paul has changed through his relationship with John Coffey. Start at point #5:07, where he invites his co-workers to his house for lunch.

Clearly, Paul is quite different from the start of our story. Does he now have faith in Coffey?

What is faith?

What does Swedenborg say?

The progress of faith in those who are being created anew is as follows. Initially such people are without any life, as no life exists in evil or falsity, only in goodness and truth. Afterward they receive life from the Lord through faith. The first form of faith to bring life is a memorized thing—a matter of fact. The next is faith in the intellect—faith truly understood. The last is faith in the heart, which is faith born of love, or saving faith. SH #30

This approach is quite extraordinary in today's world. If you ask most people what their faith is, they will tell you what they believe. If you ask where the beliefs come from, they might say that it is from their family and church; their faith tradition.

Swedenborg would not consider this to be mature faith. Initially, one's faith is memorized; it is listing of facts. Next, it comes from the intellect; it is understood. Then it comes from love

If we look at Paul in the movie, we can guess that at the start of the movie, he might have attended a church that had a particular belief system, which he would claim as his own, by rote.

After seeing Coffey perform healing miracles, he understood faith very differently. His mind saw and experienced the miraculous.

Then, finally, he came to love and trust Coffey. That is true faith; from the heart.

TIME FOR A SONG
"The Unicorn Song"
Peter, Paul, and Mary

34 Love and faith can never be separated, because they make a single unit.

Faith without love is not faith at all. Paul might have had a faith tradition in his family. But if it was something he learned by rote, then it was not true faith. The faith which he saw with his own eyes, and the man whom he came to love with his heart, was faith.

[3] In fact, what else is faith but a partnership with God by means of truths that shape our understanding and thought? What else is love but a partnership with God through goodness that shapes our intentions and desires? God's connection to us is a spiritual connection that comes to an earthly plane; our connection to God is an earthly connection that comes from a spiritual plane.

The states of the faith of the new church are (1) a newborn faith, a growing faith, a mature faith; (2) faith based on genuine truth, and faith based on things that seem true; (3) faith based on memory, faith based on reason, faith based on light; (4) earthly faith, spiritual faith, heavenly faith; (5) faith based on life experiences, and faith based on miracles; (6) faith that is free and faith that is coerced.

From what I have said just above it is clear that there are three things that form faith in us: first, turning to the Lord; second, learning truths from the Word; and third, living by those truths. #348

What do you call your faith? Is it a mature faith?

Is it based on what you have actually found to be true, or on what things seem like they might be true?

Is it something you memorized? Or something you grasp with your mind? Or do you own it in your heart?

Is it based on your own experiences in life, or on stories of miraculous events that you have heard from others?

Is it a faith freely chosen, or one that is coerced?

Is it an integral part of your relationship with God?

Do you live your life by your faith?

We'll be exploring these questions this month.

Next Sunday, the sermon will look in more depth at the faith journeys of those in the *Green Mile*. It will also give you an opportunity to look more deeply at faith in your own life.

Miracles, Faith, and the Green Mile

July 19, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

Genesis 1:14, 15, 16, 17. And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to make a distinction between day and night; and they will act as signals and will be used for seasons for both the days and the years. And they will be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth," and so it was done. And God made two great lights: the greater light to rule by day and the smaller light to rule by night; and the stars. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens, to shed light on the earth.

From Swedenborg

This show us that a faith caused by miracles is not a real faith but only second-hand belief.

DP NCE #131

The effect of miracles on good people is different from their effect on evil people. Good people have no desire for miracles, but they believe the miracles in the Word. If they do hear anything about a miracle, they think of it only as a minor argument that strengthens their faith, because they base their thinking on the Word and therefore on the Lord and not on the miracle.

It is different for evil people. They can actually be constrained and compelled to faith and even to worship and devotion by miracles. This lasts only a short while, though, because their evils re pent up inside, and the compulsions and gratifications of those evils are constantly working away inside their outward worship and devotion.

DP NCE #133

MESSAGE

Miracles, Faith, and the Green Mile



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Love, Spirit, Life

Background

I started my relationship with this month's movie [*The Green Mile*] by skipping over violent scenes. I have now reached the point where I am sobbing through the rest of them.

I've read the book by Stephen King, as well as having seen the movie again [including *most* of the violent scenes]. I am not totally certain why the impact of this story has hit me so deeply. The book-movie combo is quite intense. The movie uses light and color in dramatic ways to indicate the presence of the Divine. The book provides more detail on the spiritual lives of the characters. They go together well.

This story is not "religious," but it does have powerful and moving spiritual themes. They include: good and evil; life and death; heaven and hell; faith, miracles, healing, and salvation! We could, actually, spend weeks delving into them.

However, our plan is to use a movie each month to help us explore our theme in the lives of people [real or fictional.]

So What is our theme this month?

If it is not on the tip of your tongue, then here is the answer. Each month this year we are:

using one stage of Swedenborg's regeneration as based on the creation, and comparing it with one of the 12 steps from A.A.

So you'll see that under the "Worship" heading we now have a category for "This Month's Theme", which includes [Swedenborgian readings](#) as well as other [worship resources](#) [including information on the movie].

We also have a [blog](#) on the monthly theme!

It can be complicated to compare a 12-step system with a 7-stage system! It's helpful to keep looking at the [yearly chart](#).

Our theme for this month:

A.A.Step #7: *Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.*

Regeneration Stage: #4: *Two lights of faith and love*

Movie: *The Green Mile.*

Our focus from the movie that corresponds to our theme is:

Faith and love as they unfold in the life Paul Edgecomb, main character in the Green Mile.

Paul's faith journey

The book give us fascinating insight into Paul's childhood religion:
p. 190

"As a boy who'd grown up going to whatever Baptist or Pentecostl church my mother and her sisters happened to be in favor of during any given month. I had heard plenty of *Praise Jesus, The Lord is Mighty* miracle stories. I didn't believe all of them, but there were plenty of people I did believe

"I grew up in a tradition of miracles and healing. I grew up believing in *gris-gris*, as well as... stump water for warts, moss under your pillow to ease the heartache of lost love, and, of course, what we used to call *haints*."

I had never heard the terms *gris-gris* or *haints*. Time to do some research!

Gris-gris: These are like charms or talismans.

Haints: These are ghosts.

Miracles of John Coffey

So Paul's childhood had prepared him for the miracles of John Coffey's healings. Were they the same type of miracles?

You may want to watch the "miracle", healing scenes from the movie. They were included last week.

Paul's reactions to the miracles

Read again today's Swedenborgian reading. Swedenborg sees miracles as only a minor help for those who already have faith, and of no use to those who have no faith. Which kind of person was Paul? This will be a good question for discussion. My sense is that he had a childhood of faith that included miracles. As an adult, he participated in the miracles differently: they were no longer an example of faith. They became part of love in Paul's life, and a major part of his life of "uses."

How do you see Paul's faith journey transformed when love comes to be at its center?

How is Paul changed as a person when he opens his heart to John Coffey?

These are themes for personal reflections, chats, forums, and blogs this month. In a general sense, I think that Paul's faith experience with Coffey is not so much about miracles. He grew up with miracles. But it was about opening his heart to an African-American prisoner on death row, convicted of rape and murder.

Paul reflected a lot -- esp. in the book -- on God's role in all of this. He says on page 191: "healing is never about the healing or the healed, but about God's will. For one to rejoice at the sick made well is normal ... but the person healed then has an obligation to ask 'why,' to meditate on God's will and the extraordinary lengths God has gone to realize His will."

What did God want of Paul? How was Paul to change his life to reflect this new integration of love and faith?

Paul's own personal healing took place early in the story. Much of the rest of the story is about his coming to terms with what it means for him.

Paul's Old Age

The movie is a flashback that Paul is having about his life, as he ages slowly in a retirement home. He is filled with questions:

What is life? Has God condemned him to a long life as punishment for participating in a death? Does God punish death with life?

How does he have gratitude for the miracles in his life, while also having anger at God [John Coffey] for not being offering a miracle at other times -- like when his wife is dying in an accident?

Is he condemned to hell for participating in Coffey's death? Or condemned to a long life on earth?

Did he thwart God's plan of love when he helped to kill Coffey? Or was he helping to fulfill God's will? [an interesting parallel here to the questions of Judas about the death of Jesus.]

How does God expect him to live out his life? Does he have any particular obligations because of the healing he received and the miracles he witnessed?

Your life

How do you answer these questions for your own life? How do faith and love intertwine as you live your life day by day?



Loving God or Loving Our Defects

July 26, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

Luk 18:9 And he spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector.

Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Luk 18:13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

From Swedenborg

39 Genesis 1:20. And God said, "Let the waters cause the creeping animal—a living soul—to creep out. And let the bird flit over the land, over the face of the expanse of the heavens."

After the great lights are kindled and placed in the inner self, and the outer self is receiving light from them, the time arrives when we first start to live. Earlier, we can hardly be said to have been alive, thinking as we did that the good we perform and the truth we speak originate in ourselves.

On our own we are dead and have nothing but evil and falsity inside, with the result that nothing we produce from ourselves has life. So true is this that by our own power we cannot do anything good—at least not anything inherently good.

From the doctrine taught by faith, anyone can see that we cannot so much as think a good thought or will a good result or consequently do a good deed except through the Lord's power. After all, in Matthew the Lord says:

The one who sows good seed is the Son of Humankind.⁶⁰ (Matthew 13:37)

Good cannot come from anywhere but this same unique source, as he also says:

Nobody is good except the one God. (Luke 18:19)

MESSAGE

Loving God or Loving Our Defects

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen. [AA Big Book, p. 76]

I heard about a young man, newly sober, who had recently started the A.A. 12-step recovery program. I'll

call him Bob. Bob had worked very hard on Step 6, preparing himself to have his defects removed. At last, he was ready for Step 7. He said that he prayed the above prayer one night before going to bed. He awoke with great excitement, eager to live his life free of defects. At breakfast, his wife spilled coffee and he yelled that she was a stupid idiot. At work, his boss wanted his over-due report and he found himself lying again that it was almost ready.

By lunch time, it was clear that he still had most of his character defects. He was so disappointed in God and in the recovery program, that he almost drank that night. Fortunately, he decided instead to go to a meeting. Bob chatted with his sponsor, Sam, during the break and told him about his disappointment. Sam was rather amused, as he pointed out that Bob had been working the steps all by himself; not with a sponsor or a group or even workbook materials. Sam said, "You forgot the most important part: humbly asked God. You have to be humble to know that you can't do it by yourself!"

Bob joined a group working on the steps, and did several things differently. First, he did the first 6 steps again, and took his time to delve into them deeply. By the time he reached step 7, he no longer expected God to magically take away his defects. He was willing to work with God.

This time he read carefully these words in AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions: The Seventh Step is where we make the change in our attitude which permits us, with humility as our guide, to move out from ourselves toward others and toward God. The whole emphasis of Step Seven is on humility

A book on recovery says that there are 3 reasons why we need humility

1. *So that we can recognize the severity of our character defects.*
2. *So that we can acknowledge the limits of human power in addressing these character defects.*
3. *So that we can appreciate the enormity of God's power to transform lives.*

Serenity, A Companion for Twelve Step Recovery, p. 54-55

Grant Schnarr, author of Spiritual Recovery: A Twelve Step Guide says: *Humility is used in this step to remind us that we will still be tempted to tackle our character defects alone – without God's help.... Asking God to remove our shortcomings isn't enough. We have to do our part and cooperate with him to allow these changes to take place. [pp. 69-70]*

This shows us the similarity between Swedenborg and step #7. We move from stage 3 – where we think we do good all by ourselves – to the humility of stage 4 when we realize God does it all.

Swedenborg writes: *In the fourth state, love stirs and faith enlightens us. Before this time we may have spoken devoutly and yielded a good harvest, but we did so in a state of trial and anguish, not at the call of faith and kindness. In consequence they are now kindled in our inner self and are called the two lights. SH #10*

We've already read this by Swedenborg:

Earlier, we can hardly be said to have been alive, thinking as we did that the good we perform and the truth we speak originate in ourselves. On our own we are dead and have nothing but evil and falsity inside, with the result that nothing we produce from ourselves has life. So true is this that by our own power we cannot do anything good—at least not anything inherently good. From the doctrine taught by faith, anyone can see that we cannot so much as think a good thought or will a good result or consequently do a good deed except through the Lord's power. ...

[2] Still, when the Lord brings us back to life, or regenerates us, he at first allows us to harbor these mistaken ideas. At that stage we cannot view the situation in any other way. Neither can we be led in any other way to believe and then perceive that everything good and true comes from the Lord alone. ... SH #39

So, it is essential that we approach this step with humility. Yet, it is also important that we not become so self-critical, that we are beating ourselves up.

Venerable Thubten Chodron, a Buddhist nun, says

There are situations where we have a problem, and, perhaps, we blame ourselves. We are very good at that, too, aren't we? We can really get into that one..."It's all my fault. Something is wrong with me. I'm terrible. I'm this awful person! Look at me! Oh, nobody can love me. I'm horrible. I did it again!

It's called the "Beat-myself-up" syndrome. And we do it very, very well. ...

We're very important, then, aren't we? Extremely important. So it's very curious how, when we get into this performance of blaming ourselves, and feeling guilty, and self-hatred. It's actually a rather contorted way our self-cherishing mind has of making us extremely important.

We can have transformation in our character defects even when there is not a specific point in time when we prayed for that. In the movie, *The Green Mile*, Paul was radically transformed through spiritual experiences. We don't see a specific point when he realized his defects and asked to have them removed. But he gave up his limited understanding of "faith" and "God" through his life experiences.

AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* talks about removing character defects as a life-long process. Grant Schnarr suggests moving through defects one at a time, over a period of years. He emphasizes that there must be teamwork between us and God. He suggests an image of turning your life over to God, and then getting in the passenger seat of your car, and holding up your keys for God to grab and drive! That will be a long wait; God doesn't drive cars for us! But God does offer guidance and strength when we

humbly ask for help in letting go of our stumbling blocks to finding union with the Divine.

Is there a particular defect that you would like to ask God to help you with this week?

My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen



Pearls to Power

August 1, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

Matthew 7

Judging Others

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

From Swedenborg

6. The Lord, goodwill, and faith form a unity in the same way our life, our will, and our intellect form a unity. If we separate them, each one crumbles like a pearl that is crushed to powder.

True Christianity; #336

MESSAGE

Pearls to Powder

It's the first day of August! In the cool of early evening, I take my dogs for a walk down the country lane and through the woods. Early August evenings hold so many happy memories. My mind takes me back to a warm summer evening on the church lawn. I was about ten, and so excited about our church ice cream social! That ice cream was a big draw in my age group. But, then, there was better ice cream in downtown shops. But here, the kids I knew best were there, too. It really wasn't about the ice cream, of course. We all lingered long after eating to share the stories of our lives; the joys, the sorrows, and everyday tedium.

I spent summer mornings with my friends in Vacation Bible School. I loved seeing the teacher walk in with a great big packet of fun stuff to do. We'd have a Bible story, and games and crafts. There'd be some songs – and of course juice and cookies.



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This was my spiritual community. I wouldn't have understood that phrase at ten, but I did understand being with people I cared about to share ice cream and songs and Bible stories as our lives intertwined.

“Community” was at the center of Swedenborg’s world view. Perhaps that is part of the reason that our denomination has so many flourishing camps during the summer – in many locations, for different ages, and each with its own unique style.

Summer is a time for community at camps. This year, August is our time to ponder the 8th step of AA:

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to amends to them all.

One [twelve-step workbook](#) [p. 87] says:

Step Eight brings us to the end of isolation from ourselves, our community and our Higher Power, and sets the course for restoring our relationships.

Are there relationships that you want to restore?

[Another step book](#) [160] says:

Step Eight begins the process of healing damaged relationships through our willingness to make amends for past misdeeds. We can let go of our resentments and fears and start to overcome the guilt, shame, and remorse we have because of our harmful actions. We can leave behind the gray, angry world of loneliness and move toward a bright future by being willing to make things right.

Our Swedenborgian reading this month will focus on *True Christianity*, sections #362-372. Here Swedenborg is telling us that the essence of faith is how we live our lives in community. At the start of Section 6, Swedenborg says:

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The Lord, Goodwill, and Faith form a unity in the same way our life, our will, and our intellect form a unity if we separate them, each one crumbles like a pearl that is crushed to powder.

That is quite a dramatic image! Think of your faith, your goodwill, and the Lord’s love all like shining pearls when they are together. Then take them apart, and see them crumble to powder.

The Lord flows into everyone with all his divine love, all his divine wisdom, and all his divine life.

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the essence of faith is life from divine wisdom and the essence of goodwill is life from divine love.

“Goodwill” means all the goodness from the Lord which moves us and which we then intend and do.

Our faith only has meaning when it comes from the Lord and when we live it in our daily lives.

How do you live your faith in your life?

This is a month for us each to ponder this question for ourselves.

Is there anything from the past that gets in the way of fully living your faith?

If so, this is the month to make a list of whatever gets in the way, and think about how to move beyond it.

When you consider what amends you need to make, it can be helpful to start with yourself.

When have you neglected to honor your own needs? When have you despised yourself, instead of loving yourself as God does?

When have you been self-critical over self-supportive?

When have you denied the gifts and talents that God gave you?

You are invited to take some time this week to review the amends you need to make to yourself.

Next week, we'll talk about the Quoyle, the main character in *The Shipping News*. We'll consider the amends he needs to make to himself, his child, his ancestors, and his community.



Amending the Past

August 9, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible

Mt. 5

Love for Enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor[h] and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies[i] and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

From Swedenborg

[3] In fact, what else is faith but a partnership with God by means of truths that shape our understanding and thought? What else is love but a partnership with God through goodness that shapes our intentions and desires? God's connection to us is a spiritual connection that comes to an earthly plane; our connection to God is an earthly connection that comes from a spiritual plane.

The ultimate purpose in creating us citizens of heaven and also citizens of the world was this partnership. As citizens of heaven we are spiritual and as citizens of the world we are earthly. Therefore if we become spiritual-and-rational and also spiritual-and-moral, we forge a partnership with God. Through this partnership we have salvation and eternal life. On the other hand, if we are only earthly-and-rational and earthly-and-moral, God is indeed connected to us but we are not connected to him. The result of this is spiritual death (which by definition is earthly life without spiritual life), because spirituality, in which the life of God exists, has been extinguished in us.

True Christianity, #369

AMENDING THE PAST

Have you ever had a period in your life where everything seemed to go wrong at once? A time when everything of importance to you disappeared?

I'm going to tell what happened to one man in the chaos of a life spinning out of control. His name is Quoye. He is fictional, created from the fertile mind of Annie Proulx in her book, *The Shipping News*, published in 1993. It became a highly successful film in



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2001.

If you enjoy watching trailers, here it is:

The Shipping News Trailer

Quoyle was a man in his 30's who worked as an ink setter in New York. He tried to keep his life fairly routine. It was not easy with his wife, Petal, who was gone a lot – often spending time with other men. She left Quoyle to care for their two girls: Bunny, age 6 and Sunshine, age 4 and a half. [in the movie, they have only one child: Bunny.]

One night he hears his wife come home late with another man, and hears the squeaking of the guest bed for several hours. He is deeply hurt; he loves Petal yet she wants a divorce.

The next morning at breakfast, they glare at each other in silence. Petal's only words to him: "grow up."

Proulx writes about that morning:

Quoyle believed in silent suffering ...He struggled to deaden his feelings; to behave well. A test of love. The sharper the pain, the greater the proof. If he could endure now, if he could take it, in the end it would be all right. It would certainly be all right. [p. 16-17]

However, life was to get so much worse, that he would no longer be able to bear it in silence.

A year came when this life was brought up sharply. ... [p. 18]

It began with his parents. His father was diagnosed with liver cancer and his mother with a brain tumor. They stockpiled their painkillers. Then they tidied up everything in the house, took all the pills and then a left message on Quoyle's phone machine at work telling him what they had just done.

So, Quoyle now had a funeral to prepare for. And the visit of Aunt Agnis Hamm, who writes a note that she'll be coming to the funeral on her way to Newfoundland.

You might wonder how things could get even worse. But they do. He comes home one evening to find Petal and the girls gone. He learns that his wife has run off with another man, taking the girls with her.

He calls the police to bring back his girls, and ends up getting horrible news. Petal was just killed in an automobile crash. Fortunately, the girls were not in the car, having been sold on the black market. Fortunately, the police are able to find Bunny and Sunshine and bring them back; hopefully before they were abused.

So what is left for him to lose? Ah, yes. His job. Yep. He lost that next when some staff had to be laid off.

As he and the girls and Aunt Agnis return from the funeral of Quoyle's parents, Agnis has a

serious talk with him. She is re-locating to the ancestral home in Newfoundland, and invites him along. She says in the book:

[p. 29] *“it makes sense for you to start a new job and a new life in a fresh place. For the children’s sake as well as your own. It will help you all get over what’s happened. You know it takes a year; a full turn of the calendar; to get over losing anybody.... And it helps if your in a different place. And what place would be more natural than where your family came from?”*

This makes some sense to Quoye, since there is nothing to hold him to New York. He and the girls pack, and cash in the \$30,000 life insurance policy from Petal, and head north to find a new life.

Quoye is shocked when he sees the “ancestral home. It hadn’t been lived in for 44 years, and had an insecure foundation on a cliff overlooking the ocean.

It turns out that the “Quoye” name is well-known in this area, and people want to get to know him. Quoye applies for a job as an ink setter at the local newspaper. They do not need an ink setter. They do, however, need reporter to cover “the shipping new.” And, of course, car accidents; which are always big news. People like to read about what ships are in the harbor and what goods they are selling.

He starts to find his own sense of self when he veers away from car wreck coverage – or writing about the goods in the ships. He talks to people on the ships that come in, and learns that one ship had been owned by Hitler. He gets all of the fascinating details, and writes an article. This is big new! His rival on the paper is convinced that Quoye will be fired for writing about ridiculous stuff instead of the important car accidents. However, the boss is receiving phone calls of appreciation, and encourages Quoye to continue with a regular column.

We see Quoye’s veneer of ice starting to melt as he connects with his inner core. [We would probably call it “God.”] He meets a woman who loves children, and he falls in love again. He is starting to gain some self-esteem from his job. However, he is hearing about secrets of his ancestors – who were pirates who had to run out of town.

Does he carry the sins of his ancestors? Does he need to makes for them? He probably does not. However, his life experience leads him to start reversing his family’s reputation. He makes friends with the one surviving local member of the family and brings him into community life. He becomes an active participant in the community.

By the end, he comes to know himself, and to live his uses in the world. He experiences deep love, and marries again. His wisdom is expressed through the writing of his column. He performs many uses in the community and for his family.

So what if ask Quoye early in the movie what amends he feels he needs to make? What people does he need to forgive? What would he say?

Early in the story, the list might be:

His father, who almost drowns him when he was a boy
Petal, who runs away with the girls and sells them on the black market
Bunny and Sunshine who suffer the most from his insecurities and fears
The relatives and ancestors he had avoided knowing
His amends are not as specific and direct as they often are in 12 step programs. But they flow naturally from his being. His very life becomes an on-going amend to himself and to the world.
How might Swedenborg look at this life of regeneration?

As Quoye is living out step 8 [and 9], Swedenborg might find similarities in his Stage 4 of Regeneration.

He writes:

(c) Our partnership with the Lord is reciprocal: the Lord is in us and we are in the Lord. The partnership is reciprocal. Scripture teaches this and reason sees it. The Lord teaches that his partnership with his Father is reciprocal. ... [TC, 371]

372 (d) This reciprocal partnership between the Lord and us comes about through goodwill and faith. ... It follows that the more involved we are in acts of goodwill and in truths that relate to faith, the more we are in the Lord and the Lord is in us. Our partnership with the Lord is a spiritual partnership, and spiritual partnerships take place only through goodwill and faith.

What about Quoye's faith and acts of goodwill? Let's consider these:

The goodwill of attending to the death of parents
The goodwill of being a single parent to his girls
Having the faith to move to Newfoundland
Having the faith to take a job as reporter
Having the faith to ignore the assignments, and instead to follow his heart
Having the faith to fall in love again
Leading a life of goodwill in his community and with his family

At the end ... he no longer suffers in silence. When he suffers, it is with friends and family. But mostly, he is content in the living of a quiet life in community.

His amends were more than good works towards particular people; they came through forming a partnership with God in faith and acts of goodwill.

Have you ever been through a period when everything seemed to fall apart?

Are there ways you were able to form a "partnership with God" to move through the crisis?

How was faith important to you during the crisis?

Did acts of goodwill help you to form a partnership with God?

How were you different as a person after moving through the crisis? Did it seem that you had made another step in your regeneration?

Worry

August 16, 2009

From the Bible

Mt. 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

From Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia #2338 “Temptations involve feelings of doubt about the Lord's presence, mercy, and salvation. . . . But good spirits and angels . . . sustain hope in us, and an affirmative outlook.”

MESSAGE

When the Lord said *don't worry*, or that nothing is impossible, he meant that with his power we could conquer our troubles. So, the only solution for worry is by using God's power to end it. This is a different way of looking at the situation. The only way that will work.

Arcana Coelestia #2338:

“Temptations involve feelings of doubt about the Lord's presence, mercy, and salvation. . . . But good spirits and angels . . . sustain hope in us, and an affirmative outlook.”

If we intellectually accept the truth that all power is from God, this still does not make us conscious of the actual inflowing of God's power. The illusion is that we act by our own strength and power, ALONE. The Lord allows us to keep and cherish this illusion in order to preserve our status as beings of free will. If we decide in favor of the Lord's way, it must be a free and unforced decision.

Before Jesus was nailed to the cross, he was placed in front of the Roman governor, Pilate, who had to judge Jesus for his trial. Jesus then spoke a timeless truth when he said, "You would have no power at all over me unless it were given to you from above" (John 19:11). These are true words for each one of us. The power we have is from above, but in our day-to-day life, we are not conscious of this active life force that flows into us from the Lord.

From Romans 38-39 we read: "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

A John Hopkins University doctor said, "We do not know why it is that worriers die sooner than the non- worriers, but that is a fact." But I think I know; We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue, brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. To live by worry is to live against reality.

So when you're walking along and a worrisome thought, a selfish or negative thought enters your mind, you have 3 options:

1. Dwell on it
2. Say I am not going to do that, I am not going to let that in
3. OR The Lord's not going to let that into my life.

Someone once said: "Every evening I turn my worries over to God. God's going to be up all night anyway." Another line I have often heard is: "Why worry? It is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do but it doesn't get you anywhere." And my all time favorite saying about worrying, that I learned in the 12-step program is: "If you worry, why pray? If you pray, why worry?"

"I love the Lord!" I am a Christian, I believe in the Lord and that the angels are fighting for me. I can't fight worry alone, but the Lord can and will fight them with me. And when we ask the Lord to help us, the negative thoughts and what they attract to us spiritually will flee our lives. They will flee when they know that the Lord is over our hearts.

"I love the Lord, I love the Lord." Saying this over and over in itself might be enough to make those worrisome thoughts go away. When you do this you turn your worry over to God. Please realize: there is more on your side, fighting for you, than on the negative side. The worries will flee if we ask God for help. So the ridiculous situation of saying: *I am going to fight all those negative spirits and worrisome thoughts*, can be changed to: *the Lord is here with me, God is over my heart and we will win together.*

So if we ask for the Lord's loving power to fight the battle against worry --those negative and impossible voices -- we can keep our hope in the Lord.

Help us, Dear God, to stay in hope and rejoicing for the Lord's power in our lives and let us

continue to praise God for our many blessings instead of dwelling in the land of worry. I pray that you may continually dwell in God's loving presence. Amen.

Evil

August 23, 2009

READINGS

Matthew 16:25-26

Jesus said: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

Evil and false things are absolutely opposed to good and true things because evil and false things are demonic and hellish, while good and true things are divine and heavenly. On first hearing, everyone will admit that evil and good are opposites, and that the distortions of evil are opposite to the truth of what is good. However, the whole feeling and consequent sense of people who are engaged in evil pursuits is that evil is good. Evil gratifies their senses, especially sight and hearing, and therefore it also gratifies their thoughts and consequently their perceptions. Because of this, while they do recognize that evil and good are opposites, as long as they are engaged in evil they call evil good and good evil because of their delight.

DLW #271

Message

I passed a church sign the other day which read: Baptist Church presents "Heaven's Gates or Hell's Flames." Free admission!

Humans struggle with evil. I have had a hard time with people that claim they don't believe in evil. I don't care if they call it an absence of positive energy or give it another name, evil exists. Evil is caused by people shutting down from or turning away from love and goodness and wisdom - or from **God**. If you have lived in this world for any length of time, I bet you have cried out in despair at some evil that has transpired in the world. Senseless drive by shootings? How about robberies and murders for nothing more than a pair of tennis shoes? Evil is in the news every day. Humans struggle with evil.

Swedenborg had much to say about seeing evils, rejecting them, and abstaining from them as sins against the Lord, and that in proportion as one shuns evils, one can do good. But we need to **see** the evil and definitely not deny its existence.

Thoreau once said- "He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with evil." we must not be content with shunning personal evil. We have a responsibility for social evil as well. We may not be causing evil directly, but we need to do our part to end it. For Thoreau, civil disobedience--that is, refusing to obey a law that is unjust--would be the same as shunning evils.

Evil is not evil just because it is against the law or because it is morally, ethically, and civilly unjust. It is evil because it separates us from God-- which means that it also separates us from the best in ourselves. Our actions have consequences, and it is these consequences that make the difference between good and evil.

There is a little more to it than that, though. Our actions have consequences in two basic directions--inward and outward. The outward is how it affects another or others. The inward consequence is that we shut off or close down and remove ourselves from God's presence.

With these thoughts about evil in mind, I want to share with you about a problem in Florida, in our backyard area of Immokalee. The agricultural industry in Florida is, unfortunately and to our nation's shame, filled with abuse of the migratory workers that pick the crops of tomatoes and oranges. The abuse and lack of rights for these people is so bad that there is also the evil of slavery happening! Slavery in the US of A. Abe Lincoln must be crying over this. All his hard work and it is here again! 7 convicted court cases of slavery since 1997

The 13th amendment, added to the constitution in 1865 forever abolished slavery in the USA, it is a crime to hold slaves, to force people to do another's bidding against their will. This was a long hard fought battle of civil war, it tore our nation apart and it took many decades for those affected to recover from this tragedy of evil. And yet even with all of this, slavery continues in our nation! And it continues in the world - an estimated 27million are enslaved.

What is this evil that possesses humans to want to control, use and abuse other people? This evil is a perversion of our natural love to want to have an impact, an effect on others. It is in the most basic love of needing attention from others to live. The love of dominion is talked about a lot by Swedenborg.

Arcana Celestia 10814 - Love of dominion from the Lord and heaven uses that love to teach and guide others with how they ought to live, does good for them, and as far as they can, gives them of their own. There is the dominion of love towards the neighbor, among those who are wise from faith in and love to God; for these, love the neighbor.

But then there is the love of dominion from a selfish place, from self-love, that shuts off God's good intentions. Usually there is a struggle within us; we want to do good things and we don't want our selfishness or our need for control over others to be dominant in our actions.

This struggle against the love of dominion (from self-love), against evil or from the shutting off of God's good intentions--is a universally human struggle. You and I are daily struggling with it. We naturally want to have others serve our wants and goals. We want to be in control of our little world. Sometimes, this takes the common form of wanting what we want when we want it. It is the hell of domineering against God's ideal of serving others.

We may not always overcome the attacks of the hell of domineering. And obviously there are some here in Immokalee who are living in this hell and victimizing and creating a living hell for the ones they have enslaved.

The story of the Exodus from Egypt is a particularly powerful story. "Let my people go" from Exodus has been the watchword of the enslaved, the voice of deep longings for freedom. The exodus story has much to tell us about our inner spiritual lives, also. It tells us how we can become enslaved to selfish desires and stay too long in a place that once fed us. This place eventually becomes a snare to us and to the growth in loving and wise directions that we need for our spirit. It takes the hand of God to break us free from that place.

Humans struggle with evil. It is much easier to be righteous from a distance or when we are the ones oppressed than when we have gained power over others. In fact, if we follow the biblical story long enough, we find the prophets berated their own people for oppressing the poor, the widows, and the orphans. The once enslaved Israelites had become the enslavers.

Evil ensnares us through our loves. I don't believe most people set out to hurt, oppress or do evil to others. Evil becomes the product of listening to those thoughts in our heads that discount the needs of others; the thoughts that proclaim our rights for what we want. When confronted with the abusive treatment of the migratory workers and the need to better their conditions, an agricultural farm industry owner replied that the tractor should not tell the farmer how to run their fields! He dehumanized the workers, in his mind, to separate himself from their plight.

Humans struggle with evil. But the good news is that we have the Lord to lean on and the Lord *always* overcame evil. He defeated the hells that threatened our very free choice. And now his victories can be ours, too. If we turn to God's help when we are faced with our own evils. God will comfort you, if you turn to God in your struggles and temptations.

One Sunday after church a Mom asked her very young daughter what the Sunday school lesson was about. Her daughter answered "Don't be scared, you'll get your quilts." Needless to say, this mom was very perplexed. Later in the day, the Sunday school teacher called, about something coming up in a few weeks. Mom asked her what that morning's Sunday school lesson was about. She said "Be not afraid, thy comforter is coming."

Jesus could deal with evil because he knew what it destroyed. His actions were never negative, never simply reacting to something that had already happened, and that could therefore not be changed. There was always a goal in mind, a good to be attained.

This provides us with a genuinely helpful guideline in our own dealings with evil, both in ourselves and in our world. In our world and especially I hope within our back yards, With prayer and action, we should do what we can to stop evil from continuing, and especially not deny that evil even exists. With as much love and wisdom as possible we need to confront evil actions, stop it as we are able, and help all (including the perpetrator of hurt towards others) to find a way to live without the shame of the evil.

In our inner worlds, we need to ask for God's help to shun evil actions and intentions, and cast away our evil thoughts - As Jesus said: "Satan, get thee behind me." - When we do this, our opposition to the evil is both more resolute and wiser, and our sight is both clearer and more compassionate for ourselves and for others.

Humans struggle with evil. God knows that it takes more than civil laws for humans to stop hurting others and themselves. It takes a true intention from us and guidance from God to stop evil and to build up God's kingdom here on earth. Jesus said: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"

Is anything worth more than your soul? Amen
. AHO.

Amends Beyond the Grave

August 30, 2009

READINGS

BIBLE

[readings from Sen. Kennedy's funeral mass]

Mt. 25

31 And when the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty. 32 And all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. 34 Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in:

36 Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. 37 Then shall the just answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and fed thee; thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 And when did we see thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and covered thee? 39 Or when did we see thee sick or in prison, and came to thee? 40 And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.

Wisdom 3

1But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. 2In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure was taken for misery: 3And their going away from us, for utter destruction: but they are in peace. 4And though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality. 5Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded: because God hath tried them, and found them worthy of himself. 6As gold in the furnace he hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust he hath received them, and in time there shall be respect had to them. 7The just shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the reeds. 8They shall judge nations, and rule over people, and their Lord shall reign for ever. 9They that trust in him, shall understand the truth: and they that are faithful in love shall rest in him: for grace and peace is to his elect.

SWEDENBORG

[2] As for judgement it is twofold, that is to say, there is judgement from good and judgement from truth. People who have faith are judged from good, but those who do not have it are judged from truth. The fact that those who have faith are judged from good is quite clear in Matthew 25:34-40, while those who do not have it are judged from truth, in verses 41-46. Those judged

from good are saved since they have accepted good, but those judged from truth are condemned because they have rejected good. Good is the Lord's, and those who acknowledge this in life and faith are the Lord's, and are therefore saved; but those who do not acknowledge it in life, nor consequently in faith, cannot be the Lord's nor thus be saved. They are judged therefore according to the actions done in their life and according to their thoughts and ends in view. And when judged according to these they are inevitably condemned, for the truth is that of himself man can do, think, and intend nothing but evil, and of himself rushes towards hell insofar as he is not held back from that place by the Lord.

[3] The situation with regard to judgement from truth is this: The Lord never judges anyone except from good, for His will is to lift all men, however many these may be, up to heaven, indeed if it were possible, up to Himself. For the Lord is mercy itself and good itself, and mercy itself and good itself cannot possibly condemn anyone. It is man who, in rejecting good, condemns himself. As a person has fled habitually from good during his lifetime, so in the next life he flees from it, and therefore from heaven and the Lord. For the Lord cannot be present except within good. He is present in truth as well, but not in truth separated from good. That the Lord does not condemn anyone, that is, does not judge them to hell, He Himself declares in John, AC, 2335

MESSAGE

I was a high school student in my American history class when our school principal's voice came over the P.A. system announcing that Pres. Kennedy had been shot. I was speechless, and amazed that our teacher was sufficiently composed to talk about Presidential succession.

I was a college student watching TV in my dorm when Robert Kennedy was shot. I was shocked beyond belief, as I listened to the press coverage.

There was something satisfying in being able to say good-bye to Sen. Kennedy after his long, full life, and to think about the reunion he's having with his many relatives on the other side.

We've been exploring the theme of "making amends" this month. But a question we haven't considered is: Can you make amends to someone who has died? " I have often heard someone say, "I wish I could make amends to _____, but he/she has died."

Is there anything in our Swedenborgian theology that helps consider the possibility of making amends to a person after their death?

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND SWEDENBORG

Dr. Raymond Moody is perhaps the best known researcher on Near Death Experiences. Did you know he had been influenced by Swedenborg? One good resource for learning more about this is the Swedenborg Channel. Go to the menu item, "lectures," and then Raymond Moody, part, 2

[Raymond Moody on Swedenborg:](#)
Moody, Part 2

If you would like some good basic, information on Near Death Experience, you might enjoy this video. It includes a discussion in the IANDS group, and some discussion with various scientists.

IANDS Group and Scientists

I have been looking for some NDE's that suggest some kind of amends or reconciling took place between the experiencer and someone already passed over. Do you have any to add?

PERSONAL NDE'S

These are from the website for the International Association of Near-Death Studies [IANDS] Here is one where a person met many people from their family:

[Met by Mother](#)

After having flu-like symptoms for three days, I realized that I was not getting better and tried to find help where I worked. I was alone in London. Trying to get help I felt like I was walking above everyone. On reaching work they immediately called a taxi, which took me to the nearest emergency hospital. On arrival I passed out at once and awoke hours later in an isolation ward. Several nurses were washing me down with ice-cold water and forcing me to drink iced water. The windows were wide open in the middle of winter. A doctor arrived and told them to stop, as I was dead. At once, my spirit left my body and I looked down and observed the whole scene from above. I could see the nurses had defied the doctor; he slammed the door upon leaving the room.

Almost at once I began a terrifying journey down a black spiral tunnel to an amazingly bright light, the likes I have never seen before or since. On arriving in a very beautiful place, I was met by my mother who had died two years earlier. She told me this was heaven and began to introduce me to family who had died and I had never known. There was a bright light there that I could not look at because of its brightness. After about twenty minutes a man who I did not know came up and told me it's not your time yet and you have to go back.

The journey back was the same, but this time into darkness. When I re-entered my body I was in great pain. I was unconscious for around three days. When I finally came to, I was told about having suffered double pneumonia and surviving a temperature of over 108. They said to date no one had ever survived such a high body temperature. After two weeks in the hospital, I was transferred to a convalescent home for an additional two weeks.

The events are as clear in my mind as if they had happened yesterday. I have told many people about my story and some have said it brought great comfort to them.

Here is one where parents from the other side stopped to pass on some messages they had:

[Parental Visits beyond a Dream](#)

My parents were not overly demonstrative and after they passed away, my father on July 11, 1988 and my mother on January 3, 1989, both of them visited me in a single night.

I went to sleep normally around 10:00 p.m. and sometimes around 2 a.m. I awoke after having a VERY strong dream, more real than dream-like. I was sitting at my mother's funeral with her to my right during the services. As friends and family gathered and then left my mother watched in wonder, smiling and shaking her head. She said over and over again how this was "such an outpouring of love." After all the crowds of mourners left, she turned to me, patted my right knee with her left hand and said, "I just wanted you to know that I DO love you." This was a true closure for me as she rarely uttered such words. The scene then

faded and I woke up feeling refreshed and washed with my mother's love. There was no sadness, only a great, fulfilling completeness.

I checked the clock (2:00 a.m.) and immediately dropped off to sleep again. Once again, I was at my father's funeral. He sat to my left. He watched the mourners silently and stoically. Then he turned to me, putting his right hand on my shoulder to get my attention and said, "You need to know that I am proud of you." The scene faded and I awoke. It was barely past 2:30 a.m. My father would NEVER say this while he was alive and I spent the entire 40 years of my life being his daughter trying and failing to get him to acknowledge my accomplishments or to even smile at me. I awoke and felt so completely peaceful and full of love that I know he had a mission to return to me and give me this final message. I slept the remainder of that night peacefully and woke at my regular time of 6 a.m. to go to work.

In these stories, there is no clear example of amends, but perhaps you know of others.

September's movie, *Flatliners*, will explore the theme further in fiction, as medical students try to achieve clinical death to find out what they will experience.

Of, course, most of us won't have an NDE opportunity to make amends with someone on the other side! But, are there ways to offer amends to souls in the heaven?

MAKING AMENDS BEYOND THE GRAVE

Our family and friends in the spirit world probably know what is happening in our lives. We can behave in ways that show we have made an amend. It may not be to that person directly, but it can be in the general sense of something that person would appreciate.

We can think about the person, and send out our thoughts of regret and apology.

If nothing else, we can know that we will someday have that opportunity when we, too, are in the spirit world.

Are there people in the spirit world that you want to make amends to? Are there people there who owe you some amends? Have you found any ways to continue your amends even beyond the grave?

Love and Labor

September 6, 2009

READINGS

BIBLE

Ecclesiastes 3

A Time for Everything

1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:

2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What does the worker gain from his toil? 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on men. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. 13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil— this is the gift of God. 14 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 men will revere him.



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

22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

Footnotes:

a. Ecclesiastes 3:15 Or God calls back the past

b. Ecclesiastes 3:19 Or spirit

c. Ecclesiastes 3:21 Or Who knows the spirit of man, which rises upward, or the spirit of the animal, which

New International Version (NIV)

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SWEDENBORG

Everyone in heaven is engaged in his or her work according to its correspondence, and the correspondence is not with the work itself but with the use of each particular task (see above, §112); and everything has a correspondence (§106). When we are engaged in an activity or a task in heaven that does answer to its use, then we are in a state of life very much like the one we were in in this world. This is because what is spiritual and what is natural act as one by means of their correspondence, but with the difference that [after death] we enjoy a deeper delight because we are engaged in a spiritual life. This is a deeper life, and therefore more open to heavenly blessedness.
Heaven & Hell #394 NCE

MESSAGE

LOVE & LABOR

It is a perfect Labor Day Week-end in Maine. The sun is out, radiating a gentle warmth that beckons one to *come and be* in its overflowing joy.

My little dogs, Daisy and Coconut, have been romping happily in the sunshine. I gave them treats, and Daisy bounded off with irrepressible joy! She ran and ran around the yard, looking for just the right spot. When she found it, she furiously dug with front paws and nose until she had a good-sized hole. Then she dropped the treat from her mouth into the hole, and covered it back up with dirt. Then, she ran back, looking up at me with her dirt-encrusted nose and shining eyes eager to do it again.

Daisy could do this all day. This is her greatest passion in life--to dig holes and bury treats.

Why? I remember a chat I had with Rev. Dorothea Harvey many years ago, when she

came to visit me in NH. She and I sat in the sun out back, watching Daisy run around digging holes.

Dorothea always seemed filled with deep wisdom, so I asked her: “Dorothea, why do dogs dig?” She said, “because they can.” I smiled. She added: “And it brings them great joy.”

I ask myself how often I’m doing something in life that brings me great joy. How often do you complete a task with your eyes glowing, and filled with energy to do it again?

Most of us feel a clear distinction between our hours of labor, and our times for fun. But Swedenborg doesn’t think they need to be divided.

Psychologist Wilson Van Dusen says all of our moments can be like this:

We have two shoe repairmen, both making a living at their trade. One has as his aim the making the most money. He cuts corners on materials and workmanship. He has to grind out as many repairs as possible. The 2nd also is concerned with profit, but he enjoys meeting customers, talking of shoe problems, and he enjoys his craft. The aim of the first is his profit above the customer’s welfare. The aim of the 2nd is profit through the customer’s welfare. This is the difference between hell and heaven. [Uses: A Way of Personal & Spiritual Growth]

And just what happens in Heaven? What does one do there?

Everyone there does something specifically useful, for the Lord’s kingdom is a kingdom of uses. ...

There is a dominant love that remains with each of us after death and never changes to eternity.

Heaven & Hell, #239

“People serving their greatest use will also be enjoying themselves.” Van Dusen [p. 477]

Use invites pleasure. It is, however, granted to interrupt labors by various things that are done in the company of others; these things are recreations, and thus they are uses also. Swedenborg, AE1194 [2]

In the tapestry of your life, when do you have those special moments of fully expressing who you are, and being with God?

What is your deepest love? How often are you able to engage in the activities that express it? How can you find more time in your life to do the things that you love?

What can you do to bring more of those moments into the labors of your life?

Do those things which bring great joy. And bring joy into all that you do.

Let us pray.

Dear Divine,

You create us and our world. Help us to give thanks for all the work being done in our world; esp. for those humble tasks that often are ignored, but are part of the uses that run our world. Please be with those who seek work, but have none. Be with those who labor in work that is unpleasant in order to support themselves and their family. Guide us to see the uses and deep loves in our lives. Help us find ways to ensure that every moment is a use, and every use brings pleasure.



Forgiveness: Pros & Cons

September 13, 2009

READINGS

BIBLE

1 Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. 2 It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. 3 So watch yourselves.

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

SWEDENBORG

Another popular misconception is that when sins have been forgiven they are also set aside. This misconception is characteristic of people who believe that their sins are forgiven through the sacrament of the Holy Supper even though they have not set them aside by repenting from them. It is characteristic also of people who believe they are saved by faith alone or by papal dispensations. They all believe in direct mercy and instant salvation.

When the sequence is reversed, though, it is true: when sins been set aside, they are forgiven. Repentance must precede forgiveness, and part from repentance there is no forgiveness. DP, NCE, #280

I have also heard from heaven that the Lord forgives everyone's sins and never takes revenge or even assigns spiritual credit or blame, because he is love and goodness itself. Yet for all that, our sins are not washed away. Nothing washes our sins away except repentance. Since the Lord told Peter to forgive up to seventy times seven instances of sin, at what point would the Lord stop forgiving us? TC, NCE,, #409

MESSAGE

FORGIVENESS: Pro and Con

Sept. 13, 2009

A couple of years ago, a therapist was meeting with a group of men who had all been convicted of child molestation. They were required to attend this treatment as part of their sentence. The men kept talking about faith, so the therapist called in a minister to help lead the discussion. She was the Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

She led the group in a lively discussion of sin and forgiveness. She later [wrote](#):
But the thing I will always remember was towards the end of our time together. They said, "Whenever you talk with church people, tell them not to forgive us so quickly."
Of the twenty-seven men who had molested their own children, twenty-five were active Christians. Each one of them said that when he was arrested, he went first to his pastor. Each one had been prayed over by his pastor and sent home "forgiven." Each said it was the worst thing anyone had done to him. His pastor's "forgiveness" meant he didn't have to face what he had done to his own children and be accountable.

Real forgiveness, she says, has to involve justice.

Marie Fortune has been saying that for many years. She helped found the Faith Trust Institute in Seattle -- training and educational Center which criticizes the teachings of many Christian churches about forgiveness.

Dr. Fortune says:

In fact, Jesus' teaching on forgiveness builds on his understanding of Judaism and ethics which expects repentance from an offender who has caused harm to another. In Luke 17:1-4, Jesus is clear that repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness. ...

[Carter Heyward](#), lesbian feminist Episcopal priest says:

Whenever we are in a relatively powerless position - and gay people seeking the civil right to civil marriage is an example - our forgiveness requires several "steps":

Humility : We are mindful of our own capacity to sin, to violate others, and of our actual ongoing participation in the sins of the world. =

Willingness to forgive : This may be the hardest part for most of us because it requires us to imagine making right relation with those who are violating us and others. ...

Patience : Dorothee Soelle spoke of "revolutionary patience" and that is certainly what we need in order to wait for the Spirit to soften the heart of the enemy and, if not in this generation, then in the next, or the next.

Both of these out-spoken clergy women claim that most of our churches have missed the boat on forgiveness. When we do harm to another - individually or collectively - the church quickly forgives us and sends us on our way. When we have been harmed by another, we are encouraged to quickly forgive, forget, and move on with our lives. Forgiveness becomes as quick and easy as a fast-food pick-up window. Name your sin, pick up your forgiveness, and drive on down the road of live.

What gets missed in this approach is what Swedenborg has written about "regeneration." He says that our spiritual growth is dependent on our ability to repent of the harm we have caused to others and to make amends to them; an attitude reflected in the 12 steps of AA.

Swedenborg writes of this as a seven- stage process. The 5th stage, our focus for September, is where we speak with conviction. We speak the truth of own life experience with repentance and reformation, which is a long process of learning to change from our sinful ways

When Bill Wilson was in his final hospitalization for alcoholism, he had an experience of a white light. It was dramatic and overwhelming, and he never drank again. But his abstinence was not because of a moment of seeing a white light. It was from the years of going to meetings, asking for help, and making amends to others.

In the same way, it is easy to say, "I see the light ... I will sin no more." But most of the time, the process of repentance is a long one of changing our behaviors; not just our attitude.

Modern psychologist Janis Abrams Frank has written a book called *How Can I Forgive You? The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not To*. She recently appeared on *Good Morning America*, saying that authentic forgiveness depends on authentic repentance. She sees the process of offending against others, and being hurt, as part of life together in this world; and genuine forgiveness as "a healing transaction, an intimate dance."

Rev. Carter Heyward also says that most of us play multiple roles as victims of injustice, and the perpetrators of violence. She says it "is the context in which Jesus invites us to practice forgiveness: *Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven,*" he tells his disciples in *Luke 6:37*.

Emanuel Swedenborg wrote about similar concepts over 300 years ago. He was critical of Christian concepts of God's forgiveness coming through sacraments or mere faith. In today's reading, we have this:

I have also heard from heaven that the Lord forgives everyone's sins and never takes revenge or even assigns spiritual credit or blame, because he is love and goodness itself. Yet for all that, our sins are not washed away. Nothing washes our sins away except repentance. TC, NCE,, #409

Part of the reason that Swedenborg could accept so many faith traditions was that, for him, spiritual growth depends on how we live; not what we believe.

He says that regeneration is not easy. However, "the time arrives when we first start to live." That time is now; as we begin the fifth stage. It is the day of

creation when fish and birds appear on the earth.

We began our worship with song about a bird on a wire. Let's end with a blackbird flying.

Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Take these broken wings and learn to fly

All your life

You were only waiting for this moment to arise



Remembering Johnny Appleseed

September 20, 2009

READINGS

Mark 4:1-9, 26-29 (New Living Translation)

1 Once again Jesus began teaching by the lakeshore. A very large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat in the boat while all the people remained on the shore. 2 He taught them by telling many stories in the form of parables, such as this one:

3 “Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed. 4 As he scattered it across his field, some of the seed fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate it. 5 Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seed sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. 6 But the plant soon wilted under the hot sun, and since it didn’t have deep roots, it died. 7 Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain. 8 Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they sprouted, grew, and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” 9 Then he said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.”

26 Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, while he’s asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens. 28 The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. 29 And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

True Christian Religion #586

586. That people can only be regenerated gradually, may be illustrated by each and all things that come into existence in the natural world. A tree cannot reach its full growth in a day, but there is first growth from the seed, then from the root, and then from the shoot, which becomes the trunk, and from this go forth branches and leaves, and finally blossoms and fruit. Wheat or barley does not ripen for the harvest in a day; a house is not built in a day, nor does a person acquire their full stature in a day, still less their wisdom...

MESSAGE

Johnny Appleseed

John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, birthday is on September 26th. It was handy of him to have his birthday during harvest time. There are a number of places where he planted apple trees that now have Johnny Appleseed festivals in September and October. In the pioneer days of this country, John Chapman started many nurseries throughout the Midwest by planting seeds which he bought from cider mills in Pennsylvania. Because of the poor transportation and lack of supermarkets in those days, apples were a practical necessity in the early settlers' diets.

John Chapman owned many tracts of land throughout Ohio and Indiana. He used

this land to plant apple seeds, transplant seedlings and set out orchards. He sold and gave trees to the pioneer settlers.

John Chapman spread religious seeds as well as apple seeds. John Chapman became a missionary for the Swedenborgian Church. John shared his religion and his Bible with the settlers who listened to him. He would leave chapters from Swedenborg's book with the settlers and called it "Good News Fresh From Heaven"

He became a peacemaker between the Indians and the settlers with his loving ways towards his neighbors. John Chapman, or Johnny Appleseed as he became affectionately called, died in Fort Wayne, Indiana after more than 50 years of travel. His path through the East and Midwest now has many monuments to the memory of this man who sowed the seeds of apple trees and the seeds of God's word.

I am traveling up north next weekend and I know when I arrive there, the trees will be generating some of their fall colors. Trees are truly so remarkable and apple trees so incredibly useful. I think it is absolutely remarkable how trees grow. We planted some trees here in my yard in Florida. It is a joy to watch them grow. Some trees grow faster than others, but it usually take about 10-15 years to grow from seeds to mature tall trees that provide shade and oxygen for our planet and sometimes luscious, edible fruits. Plants are fascinating, a seed goes into the ground and with the right conditions it grows a new plant, flowers and produces fruit with a multitude of new seeds.

Growth from a tiny seed into a mature and useful plant - incredible! It always seems like magic to me and I never tire of planting seeds and watching for the miracle of growth. Growth from a tiny seed to the largest plants, it seems to occur as if by magic...you plant a seed, maybe you have prepared the ground, you might provide the water, the seed sprouts and grows without our help. It is truly a fascinating miracle every time, the miracle of growth, the miracle of life, the miracle of God.

Jesus tells us of the stages of growth after the seed of life is planted. First, there is the blade, the stem of green like the beginnings of the gathering of knowledge and truths in childhood. Then we have the head of the grain, in youth and young adulthood we sort through what we have learned and prepare ourselves to be useful in the world. Then there is the full grain, there is adulthood where we do our work. Then comes the time of harvest when all is ripened and if we have

followed God's ways, we are harvested to enter God's kingdom. Growth is a gradual process.

TCR 586. "That people can only be regenerated gradually, may be illustrated by each and all things that come into existence in the natural world. A tree cannot reach its full growth in a day, but there is first growth from the seed, then from the root, and then from the shoot, which becomes the trunk, and from this go forth branches and leaves, and finally blossoms and fruit. Wheat or barley does not ripen for the harvest in a day; a house is not built in a day, nor does a person acquire their full stature in a day, still less their wisdom..."

God is not a bad farmer--throwing seed away in all directions—in bad places for seeds to grow. He is the Sower, who throws the seed of His Word on every person, because He knows that as long as we are on this earth, where our natural minds can still be shaped toward good and away from selfishness and evil -- there are no bad places to throw the seed. Because all of us have the freedom, the truths, and even the example and words of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ and seeds can grow if we prepare ourselves to be fertile ground.

God gives to all the peoples of the world some knowledge of heaven, God's realm, and the ways to reach it, just as the sower scattered the seed in every part of the field with a generous hand. God does not look at the behaviors and deeds of the people and decide not to plant any seeds within their stony, hard or thorny, crowded heart. No God's seeds are liberally planted among all of us and when we prepare the ground for God's love to fill our hearts and minds, the growth is truly a miracle of heaven.

It is not just God's job to sow seeds however. We have the ability to sow seeds of love and truth from God. We carry these seeds around with us; we can carry seeds of the "Good News fresh from heaven", and we carry the seeds of God's love and God's loving ways. Planting these seeds on a daily basis is our job, we may never know what fruit God will create out of those planted seeds of love. There is ground to be sown all around us. Now, the ground to be sown might not look so healthy to us. Lots of weeds over here, thin rocky soil over there. Surely, we're not meant to plant in such barren spots? But that is not the way of God. God's sowing is generous and abundant. Look at the never-ending seeds of the dandelion or the puffballs from the cottonwood tree drifting through the air. God doesn't stop planting seeds just because the ground may look barren, unforgiving, or hard-

hearted. God has given us seeds to sow. In First Corinthians, Paul says that some sow, others water but God gives the increase. God provides the harvest.

Sometimes, we get discouraged. We get judgmental. We get tired and weary from depending on our own strength, our own wisdom. We begin to see hard and thorny ground everywhere. We begin to believe it worthless, pointless to keep on sowing the seeds. We don't see any growth. So where is the hard ground in your life? Is it the person you've known since forever who, no way, no how, is ever going to change? Is it those same people, there still in the soup kitchen line? Is it your neighbor? Is it someone in your family? Or, is it some area inside yourself where you are hardened of heart and afraid to change?

The results are not up to us. They are up to God. Like John Chapman did, we are to go out and keep planting the seeds of God's love. We may never know what growth is taking place in us and in others.

I am sure you have all heard stories like this one. H. L. Gee told this story. In the church where he worshipped there was a lonely old man, old Thomas. He had outlived all his friends and hardly anyone knew him. When Thomas died, Gee had the feeling that there would be no one to go to the funeral so he decided to go, so that there might be someone to follow the old man to his last resting-place. There was no one else and it was a cold, wet day. The funeral reached the cemetery; and at the gate there was a soldier waiting. He was an officer, but on his raincoat there were no rank badges. The soldier came to the graveside for the ceremony; when it was over he stepped forward and before the open grave swept his hand to a salute that might have been given to a king. H. L. Gee walked away with this soldier, and as they walked, the wind blew the soldier's raincoat open to reveal the shoulder badges of a general. The general said to Gee: "You will perhaps be wondering what I am doing here. Years ago Thomas was my Sunday School teacher; I was a wild lad and a sore trial to him. He never knew what he did for me, but I owe everything I am to old Thomas, and today I had to come to salute him at the end." Thomas did not know what he was doing. No teacher ever does.

It is our task to plant seeds of love, we can prepare fertile ground, we can water, but we must leave the rest to God. What an incredible thing to plant tiny seeds. What an incredible thing to plant seeds and watch orchards grow and provide nourishment for whole communities of people. What an incredible thing to plant seeds of God's word and provide nourishment for the heart and mind. I can

truly understand John Chapman's motivation for his life work.

Let us do the work God has given us by planting seeds by caring for one another, by being present with one another, by offering forgiveness and reconciliation, and by being the feet, arms and hands of the Lord in the world. When we are filled with Christ's loving spirit, we can reach out to others in service. And we can let go of the results! The growth is not up to us! It is not up to our own human frailties and imperfections, we are just to help and love. We just never know, and may never know, how our kindness, our loving attitude and deeds, our sharing of God's words and truths, may help prepare the ground for God's seeds to take root, growth to happen and fruit to be harvested. But we may look back over our work years later and see how we, ourselves, have grown, how God is preparing us to bear an orchid of fruit in heaven.

The hard ground of the roadway, the stones, and the thorns, can be conquered a little at a time. God has sown the seeds and God will provide the growth. Our seeds can grow, the church's seeds can grow. But we need to go and stand on that seashore, look to our Savior in that boat of His word, and follow God's ways to the life of heaven.

Let us continue to plant God's loving seeds! AHO.



Letting Birds Fly; Starting to Live

September 27, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

James 5:13-20 (New International Version)

The Prayer of Faith

13Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

17Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

New International Version (NIV)

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*20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and **let birds fly** above the earth across the expanse of the sky." [Genesis I:20]*

FROM SWEDENBORG

*the time arrives when **we first start to live.***
[Heavenly Secrets, #39]

"All the while the Lord is constantly fighting on our behalf against evil and falsity and through these battles strengthens us in truth and goodness. The time of conflict is when the Lord is t work ... and he does not rest until love takes the lead. Then the conflict ends." [Heavenly Secrets, #63].



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

TODAY'S MESSAGE

Letting Birds Fly; Starting to Live

Last Monday morning I felt like I was taking a luxurious vacation. I was in Florida, watching dolphins play in the Gulf, and enjoying sea gulls flying overhead. It was easy to forget that I was at Tampa General Hospital, had just been prepped for surgery and was waiting to be taken to the O.R. I had come to [a clinic](#) that specialized in parathyroid surgery, the kind I needed.

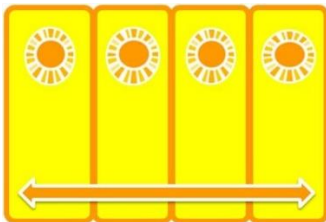
The hospital has big glass windows overlooking the water. What a blessing to have such serenity in the minutes before a surgical procedure.



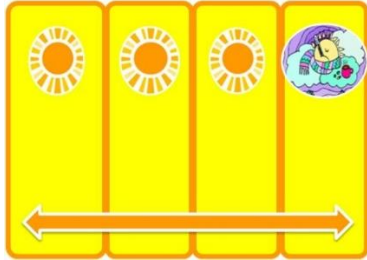
My operation was a complete success! The conjunction of sea gulls and surgery this week brought me to an encounter with our themes for this month, and I'd like to share that with you.

Here is my overly-simplified way of understanding the disease I had and the surgery that cured it.

We are all born with 4 little parathyroid glands to regulate our calcium. This diagram helps me understand that we all start with four. This little graphic is not accurate medically. It is just how I picture my original parathyroid glands. They were filled with rays of color and energy and worked together as a team. They were warm sunshine inside of me.



But my parathyroids stopped working right, and the chaos in my body's calcium levels was giving me many health problems. In all probability, one of the four glands had become sick and would have to be removed. That poor gland was no longer shining like the sun, but was sick in bed.



But, after the operation, my surgeon told me that I was in the 2% of his patients who had FOUR impaired glands; not just one. [Dr. Norman](#) said to me:



All four of your parathyroid glands grew big--not true tumors, but just bigger, juicy, happy parathyroid glands.

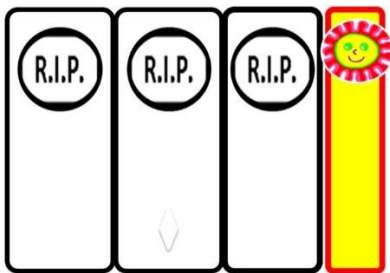
Dr. James Norman

HAPPY??? HAPPY??? My parathyroid glands were HAPPY and having fun while I was becoming sicker!

I could understand one poor little gland being sick, and not able to do its job. But I had assumed that all the parts of my body were working towards my wholeness. Clearly the parathyroid glands had been sabotaging my health! Treachery and betrayal from my own body! They were vampires.



Dr. Norman said that his surgery cured the condition by removing these vampires. [Uh, my word -- I don't think he used that term!] He was able to locate the healthiest and nicest [my word] part of a gland that would do its job properly ... and work with the rest of my body to stay healthy! A new mini-parathyroid! I'm calling her Petunia. Petunia Parathyroid.



The vampires are gone, and Petunia and I are becoming good friends. However, that doesn't mean that I'm free from any conflicts in my body. But I am more sensitive to the reality of conflict at any level of our being. And the importance of inviting God into them with us. This brings us back to this month's theme.

As we journey on the road towards our oneness with God, we need to pay attention to where there is conflict in our lives. It can be with other people; and it can also be inside of us -- even in our body. Whatever its source, if we let it fester, it can hinder our journey with God. We've been looking at how the 12 steps of AA can provide a spiritual road map that is compatible with our Swedenborgia theology. Step 9 is about making whatever amends we need in order to restore harmony with God. I realized that amends could even be with one's body.

Swedenborg wrote about conflict in his 5th stage of spiritual growth. He saw us as a completely whole -- a hologram -- in body, mind, and our actions in the world.

All the while the Lord is constantly fighting on our behalf against evil and falsity and through these battles strengthens us in truth and goodness. The time of conflict is when

the Lord is at work ... and he does not rest until love takes the lead. Then the conflict ends. [Swedenborg, Heavenly Secrets, #3].

Swedenborg says that conflict is not a distraction from our spiritual growth: it is the essence of our growth with God. Conflict is part of our journey to wholeness, and God is hard at work to help us find our way through each one. I'm realizing that each conflict in our lives can interact with all the levels of our being: our relationships with others, our inner harmony, and the functioning of our bodies. As Swedenborg says, we are a combination of love and wisdom and action in the world. Our conflicts are not signs of weakness; they are signs that we are growing.

However, we cannot ignore our conflicts. Our spiritual growth is about facing each one of them. In the 9th step, we are guided to do whatever it takes to *make things right with God*. That usually includes addressing the harm we have done to others.

This theme is expressed in our movie of the month for September: *The Flatliners*. In it, medical students want to find out what it is like to die - and then come back. They develop sophisticated ways of crossing that border, and then coming back to tell about it. However, they find that when they come back, they don't want to talk about what happened. It has churned them up at their very depth; for reasons they don't understand. They are left with frightening experiences that they can't understand. [and here comes a spoiler if you haven't seen it yet]:

As they allowed themselves to go more deeply into their terrifying experiences, they found that each one grew out of their guilt for someone they had hurt many years ago. That person was now in the spirit world. The medical students made the amends that were blocking their growth in love. The conflicts were resolved in a way that left everyone more integrated than before they faced it. They could not bring those people back to life on the earth, but they released guilt and fear.

Swedenborg compares this stage of spiritual growth with the 5th day of creation: *And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and **let birds fly** above the earth across the expanse of the sky." As we resolve our conflicts we can feel the freedom of seagulls sailing over the water. And we start to live in wholeness. *the time arrives when **we first start to live.****

God is the force of love that is striving to bring us to complete wholeness. Our bodies, our minds, and our world are full of conflicts. They are part of the journey; they are not God's end game. God is the Love and Wisdom that is with us through all of our conflicts, on all levels, to keep us moving towards pure love.

My parathyroid vampires are out of my body, but that does not necessarily restore my harmony in body-mind-spirit. That will take a lot more effort, with God's help. But I am becoming more sensitive to the role of my body in the wholeness of my being. We don't always have control over how our body functions -- or how other people interact with us. But we can invite God to help us find the places where love can bring transformation.

Where are your conflicts? With friends? Family? With people from the past? Within yourself? In your mind? In your body? With God? Do they seem to be interrelated -- part of your wholistic being?

Have you invited God into those conflicts with you?



Spreading the Word

October 4, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 28

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[a] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

James 5:13-20 (New International Version)

New International Version (NIV)

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*20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and **let birds fly** above the earth across the expanse of the sky." [Genesis I:20]*

FROM SWEDENBORG

Divine Love and Wisdom (Ager) n. 111

111. That this is so can hardly be comprehended by a natural idea, because in such there is space, but by a spiritual idea, such as angels have, it can be comprehended, because in such there is no space. Yet even by a natural idea this much can be comprehended, that love and wisdom (or what is the same, the Lord, who is Divine Love and Divine Wisdom) cannot advance through spaces, but is present with each one according to reception. That the Lord is present with all, He teaches in Matthew 28:20), and that He makes His abode with those who love Him, in John (14:23).

Those who are outside the Church (the nations) but nevertheless acknowledge one

God, and in keeping with their religion lead a life of some kind of charity towards the neighbor, are in communion with those who belong to the Church" (AC 10765).

TODAY'S MESSAGE

SPREADING THE WORD

By Rev. Cameron Linen

As I read today's reading from the *Gospel of Matthew*, my mind kept wandering to the implications of the message these eleven disciples were receiving. After all, here we had eleven people who had just lost their most beloved leader in the most horrific manner imaginable. They were most likely scared, confused, deeply saddened, disappointed, and - according to the text - even doubtful that they were really experiencing the risen Lord. As if this weren't enough, they were then told by their supposed-to-be-dead leader that they were now charged with going out into a presumably unreceptive world to inoculate and teach people their new-found knowledge and wisdom. I'd say that's a pretty tall order to fill! Thankfully, "disciples" in the church today are not presented with quite the same scenario. However, the notion of "spreading the Good News" still stands as an important concept we all must wrestle with. We may ask ourselves, "Are we supposed to spread our faith to others?", and if so, "How?" "Does it matter?" "What would that look like?" "What would attract people to our faith?" "What would repel them?" These are all important questions to consider.

It should come as no surprise that Christians the world over view the message behind that *Matthew* passage in a myriad of different ways. Some feel that proselytizing is counter-productive at best, and downright injurious at worst. Others feel that it is our *God* given obligation to go out and convert, by whatever means, as many people as humanly possible. With the latter in mind, allow me to share with you a short anecdote on a recent experience I had with a Christian from another denomination. I was ministering (as a Chaplain) to a cancer patient in a hospital when I was interrupted by a relative of the patients who inquired "Are you saved?" My poorly thought out response went something like this, "Probably not in the same way you consider yourself to be." Big mistake. After a short clarifying discussion with this relative, I was promptly told by her that it was "time for me to find a new career if I am not going to tell every patient that I see that they need to accept the Lord as their personal savior or else face eternity in hell." Furthermore, she handed me a small brochure, manufactured by her church, and

told me to "go home and pray." I quickly and politely ended the visit, and as I was walking out the door I heard her say "Oh, and if you're ever in the area, stop by our church!"

Now, raise you hand if you think this is an effective way to encourage people to come visit your church. Phew! Well, at least we're on the same page regarding that. But there are thousands of people out there who will surrender reason and tact in the name of converting others to their particular denomination or theological positions. There are people who proselytize and do mission work in the name of our Christian God that, on the surface, would appear more the work of the Hells than anything beneficent..... as some proselytizing is rooted in control and power, in harmful and often forced conversion. As Deepak Chopra once commented, "The most dangerous idea is my God is the only true God, and my religion is the only true religion." Is this what Jesus had in mind when he sent his disciples to "make disciples of all nations?" I personally do not feel it is. In fact, there are even reputable biblical scholars out there who feel that Jesus may not have even uttered these words. One organization of such scholars, the Jesus Seminar, claims that "Jesus probably had no idea of launching a world mission and certainly was not an institution builder." They have good reason to believe that these sentences written in Matthew are later additions by well-meaning followers of the infant Church. Is this true? Perhaps we'll never know. But instead of concentrating on the legitimacy of the origin of the Great Commission, maybe we should be asking ourselves, "Does it matter if Jesus said it or not?" What would happen if we all of a sudden decided that sharing our faith with others is neither commanded of us nor entirely necessary? How would churches grow? How would pews be filled? How would the Good News be transmitted to those who are interested in hearing it? How would Jesus' message of love and hope reach those who would so desperately benefit from it? And along the same lines, why is it that our minds so often insist on proof before we accept anything as true?

Swedenborg has his own take on this passage in Matthew. When Jesus told his disciples to go "make disciples of all the nations", he was, according to Swedenborg, referring to "nations" as any person, irregardless of their religious background or lack thereof, who leads a good life according to the principles known to them. In other words, any people in whom there is some goodness can be referred to as what Jesus meant by "nations." In the Arcana, Swedenborg further explains, "Those who are outside the Church (the nations) but nevertheless acknowledge one God, and in keeping with their religion lead a life of some kind of charity towards

the neighbor, are in communion with those who belong to the Church" (AC 10765). Similarly, Swedenborg felt that good people of all religions are saved. He wrote in *Heaven and Hell*, "It is a divine truth that there is no salvation apart from the Lord; but this needs to be understood as meaning that there is no salvation that does not come from the Lord." Furthermore, he states in *Divine Providence*: ". . . even they to whom the gospel could not come, but only a religion, might also have a place in that Divine Man, that is... in heaven..." Finally, even more succinctly, he states ". . . as God wills the salvation of all, He has also provided that every one, if he lives well, may have some place in Heaven" (DP 254).

Swedenborg's take on all of this works for me; but his authority for me lies in the fact that what he said makes sense, and not so much in his claim that he actually saw and heard these things in the spiritual world. Did he actually see and here these things? Perhaps, perhaps not, but I believe he saw and heard them because they are true, rather than believing they are true because this is what he saw and heard. So we've learned that Swedenborg insists that good people will be saved regardless of their religious beliefs because given time in the spiritual world, the angels will get to them and explain that Christianity is not necessarily the religion that people said it was on earth. In other words, good people will experience first-hand that their loving natures are in keeping with the God of all love and wisdom—the God we find in Jesus. This is a very good thing, because history bears witness to the fact that the Christianity we have lived out as Catholics, Protestants, and even Swedenborgians pales considerably in comparison to the example Jesus lived out while he walked among us. Swedenborg even goes so far as to state that the non-Christians in the next life are more receptive to the truths of faith than the Christians are!

What would Swedenborg say to the relative of that patient who tried to "minister" to me? Maybe he'd say something along the following lines: Because you are a Christian, you believe you are saved. But do you really understand what it means to believe? Belief is not simply a matter of confession, or allegiance, or attendance, or even rank within the church hierarchy. You could be the Pope, or a bishop, or a minister and not believe, because true belief—and now I'm quoting him—is "to love truth for the sake of truth, and not for the sake of selfish gain" (AC 9424.2). And furthermore, Swedenborg states, "We cannot become angels, that is, come into heaven, unless we bring something of an angelic character from living in the world. Present in this character is a knowledge of the way from walking in it, and a walking in the way through a knowledge of it" (*Divine Providence* #60).

So what does this all mean for us? Where do we go from here? Should we go out and tell as many people as possible as quickly as possible? Should we share our faith with no one, in fear of turning them away? Or should we live our lives being as useful as we can, witnessing to the Truth in God, however defined - whenever we can. Perhaps we should concentrate less on filling pews than on taking the opportunity to serve more people in our community. Maybe doing so would be like killing two birds with one stone! Perhaps we should avoid the pitfalls of traditional Christianity, which so often seeks to spend most of its time and energy spreading the message of theologians and philosophers who never knew Jesus and who constructed dogmas and creeds that miss the point entirely, and instead....simply spread the message of love taught by Jesus himself.

In conclusion, there is no reason to shrink from the commission Jesus has given us in the face of how destructive and counter-productive it has been historically manifested. That said, each of us needs to be a disciple. Each of us need to examine how our Swedenborgian heritage has positively influenced us, and to share that in a manner that best enables someone else to meaningfully experience it for themselves. Our discipleship need not lead to proselytizing, or shoving our self-righteousness down the throats of others. It can lead to respectful positive action for a better world, and a deeper connection with God.



Speaking with Conviction

October 11, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

1 Corinthians 13

Love

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

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

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

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

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

Swedenborg

After the great lights are kindled and placed in the inner self, and the outer self is receiving light from them, the time arrives when we first start to live. Earlier, we can hardly be said to have been alive, thinking as we did that the good we perform and the truth we speak originate in ourselves. On our own we are dead and have nothing but evil and falsity inside, with the result that nothing we produce from ourselves has life.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

So true is this that by our own power we cannot do anything good—at least not anything inherently good. ...

Now, when love and faith have brought us to life and we believe that the Lord brings about all the good we do and the truth we speak, we are compared initially to creeping animals of the water and birds flitting over the land and later to beasts. All these are animate and are called living souls.

Heavenly Secrets, #39

Message

SPEAKING WITH CONVICTION

Do you sometimes speak with conviction? And sometimes not? How can you tell when you are speaking God's truth?

Swedenborg tells us this about his fifth stage of regeneration – spiritual growth: In the fifth stage, we speak with conviction and, in the process, strengthen ourselves in truth and goodness. [HS, 11]

What an important stage this is in our regeneration! In the 3rd stage – repentance --, we speak devoutly and reverently. Yet, we think that we ourselves are doing so.

By stage 5, we realize that it is God working in us that allows us to discern truth and to speak it. It is when we realize that our words are from God that we speak with conviction, from our deepest selves.

So much of our regeneration up to now has been within ourselves. Now, we are taking our voices into the world, to speak God's truth.

What is this stage like in people's actual lives? Of course, we never know what stage anyone else is in – let alone ourselves! – But we can look at the lives of people who were committed to speaking out – even when their words were unpopular.

There are so many examples. To find one for today, I turned to Susan Poole's book, [*Lost Legacy: Inspiring Women of Nineteenth-Century America*](#). She writes about Swedenborgian women who have made a difference.

I want to share with you what Susan wrote about Ellen Spencer Mussey.

Ellen practiced law before women could be lawyers. She was active in suffrage before women could vote. And she was a Swedenborgian delegate at the first Parliament of World Religions.

Ellen was out of step with society most of her life. Actually, Swedenborgians as a group tend to

be out of step with many around them!

Ellen was a shining example of this. She lived from 1850 to 1936. She was born in Ohio as Ellen Spencer. Both of her parents died young. In 1869 she went to D.C. to live with her brother Henry and sister-in-law Sarah Andrews Spencer, who was an active and well-known suffragist. After moving to D.C., Ellen happened to meet General Reuben Delavan Mussey, Superintendent of the Sunday school at our DC Swedenborgian Church. She, too, became a Sunday school teacher, helping to teach Massey's children. Massey's wife died, and he married Ellen in 1871.

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

Not to be deterred, she studied law on her own, and joined her husband in a joint law practice. General Mussey died in 1892, and Ellen now needed to practice law on her own. She easily passed the bar exam in Washington, and was admitted to the bar in 1893.

Shortly after this, quite an exciting event came into her life: she was appointed to be a Swedenborgian delegate to the Parliament of World Religions. She presumably knew Charles Boney, the Swedenborgian who inspired and organized the Parliament as a part of Chicago's World Fair. It became a pivotal point around the world for religious tolerance and the start of the interfaith movement. Many Swedenborgians were involved in the Parliament, since our theology accepts all religious paths.

Ellen's talk at the Parliament specifically addressed women:

Dear Sisters,

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

If I had an opportunity to take a time machine back into history, I think I would choose to go the Chicago of 1893, as the World's Fair and Parliament of World Religions were taking place. There was also a women's congress held alongside the World's Fair. Many thousands of women – and many men – were there to attend those meetings.

In Susan Poole's book, she quotes a description of that conference:

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

Ellen came to see how essential organization was for the advancement of women. She returned

to DC determined to become active in the women's movement.

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

She wrote a strong letter to the *New Church Messenger* in 1898,

What a loss it would have been to humanity if Florence Nightingale, Clara Barton, and Frances Willard had been afraid of overstepping the bounds of womanly decorum. ... God made the bird to sing. He has made women to think and feel, and given them voices with which to be heard.

And so has God given us all a way to communicate: with our voices – through our vocal cords, or with alternatives like sign language or assisted communication, or even with the flutter of an eyelash.

God has given us a way in which to express ourselves in the world.

Another Swedenborgian woman who was a delegate at the Parliament was from Maine: Selma Weare Paine from Bangor. She was a writer and musician. She was active in the women's rights movement, often quoting Swedenborg on uses. In her talk at the Parliament, she said:

...there are women to whom their evident use says: 'You cannot walk in the common highway. ... You must pass alone, through the forest. You must climb this mountain. You must descend into that dark and hidden valley.

Swedenborgians have been climbing mountains and descending into dark, hidden valleys since their beginnings. We have been at the forefront of social movements such as anti-slavery and suffrage.

Where is God calling you to speak with conviction? Where are you called to climb a mountain or descend into a dark and hidden valley? Is anything holding you back?

Alive – And in Pain

October 18, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

Mark 3

1Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

4Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

5He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Swedenborg

After the great lights are kindled and placed in the inner self, and the outer self is receiving light from them, the time arrives when we first start to live. Earlier, we can hardly be said to have been alive, thinking as we did that the good we perform and the truth we speak originate in ourselves. On our own we are dead and have nothing but evil and falsity inside, with the result that nothing we produce from ourselves has life. So true is this that by our own power we cannot do anything good—at least not anything inherently good. ...

Heavenly Secrets, #39

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 its effects, they cannot know anything about inflow.

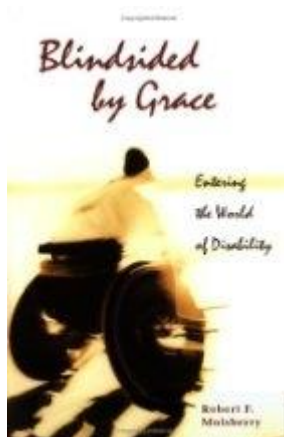
DLW NCE, 340

Message

ALIVE and IN PAIN



Rev. Robert F. Molsberry



It was 6:00 PM on May 31, 1997. In an instant, Robert S. Mulsberry's life was changed forever. He had been living an idyllic life in a small Iowa town as a parish minister, as well as a husband, father, and athlete. He had spent the afternoon working on his sermon for the next day, with a text from the 3rd chapter of Mark about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. He never did deliver that sermon, but he lived through it the next day when doctors spent the Sabbath trying to save his life.

At 6 PM on May 31st, he was riding his bike, when a hit and run driver blindsided him. Mulberry barely survived, with permanently paralyzed legs and a life in a wheelchair.

How could he come to terms with such a tragedy? He wrote a book about his healing journey, called *Blindsided by Grace: Entering the World of Disability*.

He writes:

I was blindsided by a drunk driver and have had to face a great deal of uncertainty, loss, grief, and pain. My losses have encompassed more than the use of my legs. I've also lost a sense of self-image that was highly dependent on my physical abilities and appearance. I've faced ongoing health issues and reconstructive surgeries. My life expectancy, in all likelihood, will be much reduced. Many people who see me roll cheerfully nod with determination through my day have no idea what it costs me, what I've had to give, and how I still grieve.

But whole new realities have also opened up as a result of this life-changing incident. My pace has slowed down and I have been forced to become more deliberate and disciplined. People tell me that I was a decent enough pastor before the injury, but I feel as though I have become more caring and compassionate since the accident. I can empathize more with the trials that all people go through. I see human diversity in a whole new light. I have begun to develop new theological insights. I've had to rethink my understanding of God's role in tragedy and suffering, and what biblical healing is all about. [16]

Michael J. Fox has a similar perspective. He writes about his experience of being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease:

What [the doctor] did not tell me; what no one could, is these last 10 years of coming to terms with my disease would be the best ten years of my life – not in spite of my illness, but because of it.

Coping with the relentless assault and the accumulating damage is not easy. Nobody would ever choose to have this visited upon them. Still this unexpected crisis forced a fundamental life decision: adopt a siege mentality, or embark on a journey. Whatever it was that allowed me to go down the second road ... was unquestionably a gift, and absent this neurophysiological catastrophe, I would never have opened it or been so profoundly enriched. [p. x]

How can we understand such injury and illness from a Swedenborgian perspective? Swedenborg tells us that in the 5th stage of regeneration, we are coming alive – we are awakening to who we really are. What if we awaken to paralyzed legs or Parkinson's Disease?

Eugene Taylor, Ph.D, is a Swedenborgian who is a Lecturer on Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, and the 1983 William James Lecturer on the Varieties of Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School. In his book, *A Psychology of Spiritual Healing*, he discusses a way to understand healing:

Often, we think of sickness as something transitory; but for millions of people, illness is chronic, even lifelong. The loss of limbs, a radical disfigurement, terrible pain, all of these may be permanent adjustments that a person has to make. Chronic illness, however, can also be a stimulus to kinds of internal growth that would not have been otherwise possible. ... Beethoven composed symphonies while completely deaf. Jackson Pollock, as well as numerous other artists, used conditions of psychopathology to produce new dimensions in modern art. ... while terrible things might happen to us, there is simply no telling what new doors will open up for us in our response to pain, sickness, and infirmity. Our illness can always become the vehicle toward the actualization of a spiritual destiny higher than the physical or psychological. [140-41]

All of this makes sense from a Swedenborgian perspective.

There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. [DLW 340]

The more we align with the spiritual influx, the more we are in a state of healing; regardless of the circumstances of the body.

Physicist Stephen Hawking says of his severe disabilities:

I guess we're all pretty disabled on the cosmic scale. What difference is a few muscles more or less? Disability does not really affect my consciousness. I see it as an inconvenience like color blindness.

Through reading Swedenborg, Helen Keller came to have a similar view on her disabilities. It was only her physical sight and physical hearing that were

impaired. Internally, everyone has impairment of the spiritual eyes and ears. Hers, however, were far more developed than for most people around her.

The true principle of cure is the divine love brought by the Lord's humanity and life of divine truth ... AC 5712

We can love who we are.

Molsberry writes:

If I could be miraculously cured, ... would I go for it? Darn straight I would! I'm no idiot.but have some gifts appeared as a result of - not just in spite of, but also because of - my injury and subsequent disability? Yes. And is life - just as it is, with no miracle cure on the horizon - manageable? Yes. And is it - just as it is - a good life?.... Darn tootin'! Michel J. Fox considers himself a lucky man for having been diagnosed with Parkinson's. I consider myself gifted for having been made aware of the blessings that followed my injuries and disability.Acceptance is getting to the place where you can value your current condition, whatever it may be, in spite of its limitation. [75]

The basis of healing is the Divine influx. As we align with this, we find healing. It may not be paralyzed legs walking again. But it could be a paralyzed soul dancing.

What challenges do you face in your life: physically, emotionally, or spiritually? Are there spiritual blessings in your challenges? How can you find healing through aligning with the Divine in you?

Saints and Swedenborgians

November 1, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

John 11

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

From Swedenborg

Angels talk with each other just as men do in the world, and on various subjects, as on domestic matters, and on matters of the civil state, and of moral, and spiritual life. Nor is there any difference except that their talk is more intelligent than that of men, because it is more interiorly from thought. I have been permitted to associate with them frequently, and to talk with them as friend with friend, and sometimes as stranger with stranger; and as I was then in a state like theirs I did not know otherwise than that I was talking with men on the earth. Heaven and Hell, 234

Saints and Swedenborgians

Saints and Swedenborgians

Nov. 1, 2009

Ten years ago I was spending Halloween at a retreat Center on Cape Cod. I was part of a training program designed for parish ministers to learn more about being supervisors for field education students. At one point, we were divided into small groups, and each group was to role play some difficult conversation between student and supervisor. In my group, we decided to role play a student leading a Sunday worship service just before Halloween. As I recall, I played the role of the student, whose worship service was primarily about honoring Halloween. Of course, my "supervisor" had to have a talk with me about why Halloween is not appropriate for Christian worship as it is not a Christian event.

We had a lot of laughs over the role play, but it left me with some serious questions. I had never celebrated All Saints Day or All Souls Day in my childhood, as I raised Baptist. I knew they were the two days after Halloween and all connected in some sort of pagan - Christian way. I was intrigued to know more. Would they hold any meaning for me as a Swedenborgian? I'd like to share some reflections on what I'm learning.

Connections with those in the other world

It is believed by some Christians that on the first two days of November, the veil between our world and the spirit world, is the most thin it will be during the year, and communication between the two worlds can take place. That seemed a good place to find a commonality between Swedenborgians with these celebrations. I enjoyed reading this:

A [pilgrim](#) returning from the [Holy Land](#) was cast by a [storm](#) on a desolate island. A [hermit](#) living there told him that amid the rocks was a chasm communicating with [purgatory](#), from which perpetually rose the groans of tortured souls. The hermit also claimed he had heard the [demons](#) complaining of the efficacy of the prayers of the faithful, and especially the [monks](#) of Cluny, in rescuing their victims. Upon returning home, the pilgrim hastened to inform the [abbot of Cluny](#), who then set 2 November as a day of intercession on the part of his community for all the souls in purgatory.

In Mexico, all soul's day is called Dia De Los Muertos - Day of the dead.

While the culture in the U.S. is to shy away from discussions of death, Mexicans embrace death. They use Dia De Los Muertos as an opportunity to celebrate the

death and the life of loved ones and friends they knew in this world. It is a time to celebrate memories. Sometimes a meal is prepared of the foods that the deceased had loved most. Pa de Muertos - bread of the dead - is often baked at this time.

Dia De Los Muertos was celebrated in late July and early August by Aztec Indians for thousands of years. When the Spaniards conquered Mexico in the 1500's, they looked upon this celebration as a pagan ritual. In an effort to eliminate it, they moved it to the date of All Saints and All Souls Day in November. The effort failed, and the Aztecs along with all Mexicans, continue to celebrate the holiday.

On Dia De Los Muertos, people prepare a feast with many of the favorite dishes of lost loved ones. Pan de Muertos or "Bread of the Dead" is traditional bread which is baked and eaten during this celebration. Mementos are set out of favorite things of the ones who have passed away.

INTERFAITH

Pagan: The pagan *Festival of the Dead*, celebrated souls returning to their home to share a meal. Candles in the window would guide the souls back home, and another place was set at the table. Children would beg for food to be to the dead, and then donated to feed the hungry.

Druid:

Halloween has its origins in Druidism. It was originally a festival celebrated by Celts at the beginning of winter.

Celts: Their year was divided into summer and winter. The winter half of the Celtic year began on Samhain on October 31 to honor the start of winter and was intended "*to assist the powers of growth in their conflict with winter's death.*"

Early Celts had many gods and goddesses they worshipped. Around the 5th century, the Celts became Christian.

Aztecs: Dia De Los Muertos was celebrated in late July and early August by Aztec Indians for thousands of years. When the Spaniards conquered them, they attempted to get rid of this day. No luck! So, they moved it to the same days as All Saints and All Souls Day in November. Did the Spaniards succeed in their efforts? No way.

Romans: In early A.D., Romans came to the Celtic territories, and they celebrated Samhain. They also brought their own holiday: Feralia. The Roman day to honor the dead was in late October, as well as another holiday to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. It is possible that this Roman influence is the reason apples are given out and bobbed for on Halloween.

Similar acknowledgments of those who have passed on are present in many traditions, including Buddhism, [Shintoism](#), Shamanism, [Hinduism](#). There is a widespread understanding common to all the major religions that human beings are most essentially spiritual beings who live on eternally as spiritual beings after their physical lives have ended.

WHO ARE THE SAINTS

I learned that the word saint comes from the Latin terms Sanctus, meaning "holy."

Sometimes it is seen as a celebration for all of the faithful who have died.

Over time, the church, feeling that every martyr should be honored, had picked one day for all to be remembered.

We are all saints and souls, Swedenborg said that we are all able to become angels.
- Sort of equal opportunity for all -- now and for ever.

Who are martyrs to remember ... or people who in some way worked to bring us closer to a just society?

2 weeks ago my sermon was about Swedenborgians who had made a difference in the world, and I discussed Ellen Spencer Mussey. Susan Poole had researched Mussey for her book "Lost Legacy."

Ellen practiced law before women could be lawyers. She was active in suffrage before women could vote. And she was a Swedenborgian delegate at the first Parliament of World Religions.

Ellen was out of step with society most of her life. She made a difference in the world, and is one of the "saints" I will remember today.

Gay-lesbian martyrs

Because of Maine's historic vote this week on Equal Marriage, I wondered about the history of equal unions.

I learned about two men who were in a gay partnership - and are officially "saints" in the Catholic Church.

Saints Sergius and Bacchus

Saints Sergius and Bacchus were Roman soldiers, Christian martyrs and gay men who loved each other. They were killed around 303 in present-day Syria. Their feast day is observed on Oct. 7. The couple was openly gay, but secretly Christian - the opposite of today's closeted Christians.



Recent scholarship has revealed their homosexuality. The oldest record of their martyrdom describes them as erastai (Greek for "lovers"). Scholars believe that they may have been united in the rite of adelphopoiesis (brother-making), a kind of early Christian same-sex marriage.

The men were arrested and paraded through the streets in women's clothing in an unsuccessful effort to humiliate them. Early accounts say that they responded by chanting that they were dressed as brides of Christ. They told their captors that women's dress never stopped women from worshipping Christ, so it wouldn't stop them, either. Then Sergius and Bacchus were separated and beaten so severely that Bacchus died.

According to the early manuscripts, Bacchus appeared to Sergius that night with a face as radiant as an angel's, dressed once again as a soldier. He urged Sergius not to give up because they would be reunited in heaven as lovers. His statement is unique in the history of martyrs. Usually the promised reward is union with God, not with a lover. Over the next days Sergius was tortured and eventually beheaded.

So, I have decided that I would like to honor these days from my Swedenborgian perspective. I will feel that I am not only being true to my own faith - but also being inclusive of other traditions: Aztecs, Roman god's ad goddesses, Druids, Celts, and Christians.

Other pagan holidays - such as Christmas and Easter - got taken over by Christians to make them into Christian celebrations. In our culture, they largely succeed. Halloween is different, it has never lost its pagan characters, and it flows easily into the following two days.

So, let's honor all of those people who have made a difference in our personal lives and/or in the world. And also keep in mind that we are changing the world and each other every moment of our lives.



Swedenborg's Angels

December 6, 2009

READINGS

From the Bible:

Mark 1:1-8 (New International Version)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

*"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—*

3"a voice of one calling in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.' " 4*And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

From Swedenborg

Heaven and Hell, NCE

284: Anyone who has not experienced heaven's peace cannot know what the peace is that angels enjoy....In order to perceive it, we need to be the kind of person who as to thought can be raised and taken out of the body and brought into the spirit so as to be with angels. Since I have perceived heaven's peace in this way, I can describe it, but not in words as it really is, because human words are not adequate. ...

There are two things at the heart of heaven, innocence and peace. We say that they are at the heart because they come straight from the Lord.

286. First, we need to say where peace comes from. Divine peace is within the Lord, arising from the oneness of his divine nature and the divine human nature within him. The divine quality of peace in heaven comes from the Lord, arising from his union with heaven's angels, and specifically from the union of the good and true within each angel. Those are the sources of peace... in to its essence, it [peace] is the divine joy of the Lord's divine love, arising from his union with heaven and with every individual there. This joy, perceived by the Lord in the angels and by the angels from the Lord, is peace. It flows down from there to provide angels with everything that is blessed and delightful and happy – what is called 'heavenly joy.' ...

287. 2. ... Because peace means means the Lord and heaven and also heavenly joy and the delight of



good, greetings in ancient times were – and consequently still are – 'Peace be with you.'

Message

I opened the front door to let my two small dogs out. Daisy saw the newly-fallen snow and began to run, roll, and twirl with wild abandon. Her most joyous day every year is the one when snow returns to her world. For this year, today was that



day!

When I was a child, I felt that way with the season's first snow. I would run outside, eager to lie down and flap my arms to make "snow angels."

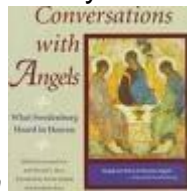
Because I've always lived in cold climates, my winters have always contained snow. The first snow has usually fallen around Christmas, and my first snow angels just before Christmas Eve.

Snow, Christmas, and angels have always been intertwined for me. In the second week of Advent, we light the 2nd candle. It represents peace, and Swedenborg's angels



bring peace into our lives.

Swedenborg wrote about his many encounters with angels. Two good books on the



topic are *Conversations with Angels: What Swedenborg Heard in Heaven*, edited by Leonard Fox and Donald Rose and *Angels in Action: What Swedenborg Saw and Heard* by Robert Kirven.

What Are Swedenborg's Angels?

Kirven's book includes a special chapter on the difference between spirits and angels; not often differentiated. Swedenborg explained that when we die in our physical bodies,

we are born in the spirit world. After death, we all spend time in an intermediary world, where angels are available as teachers. If we let them help guide us, we soon become angels ourselves. When we make contact with someone in the "spirit world," we usually connect with spirits in the intermediary level. Often our friends and loved-ones are there. However, the souls there are still learning about the heavenly realms, and may not have accurate information for us.

What do they do?

Kirven points out that they help people die, they help infants, they help people find their way, and they help us celebrate.

"When we need more strength or courage or clearer direction than we feel we have within ourselves, our appeals for help -- our silent or spoken prayers -- bring angelic assistance if those appeals are genuine and if we are willing to accept help. Angels are sent to us when we need to be led away from evil desires and the thoughts that spring from them."

Kirven says we have angels with us all of our lives. We have guardian angels when we are infants. As we grow, we have angels who specialize in our particular type of life path.

How can we hear our guiding angels?

Their voices are very soft. It is often in dreams that we get a sense of how they are guiding us. Kirven says that a good way to come to know and hear your angels is to ask them to guide you in helping others. If asked with selfless sincerity, they will be there.

How are they depicted in the arts?



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

windows, go to [this website](#).



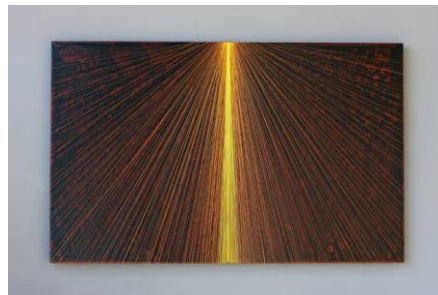
The hexagon art of Jeff Richards

While surfing the net in preparation for this message, I put together "Swedenborg, angels, and art." I then found the incredible hexagonart of Jeff Richard. He has a "[Swedenborg Angel](#)" gallery. He wrote on his website that most cultures have a concept of angels or guides of some sort.

One common denominator that seems to run through them all is a description of angels as beings of a higher frequency than most of us can perceive, much as ultraviolet light is a higher frequency of light than what our eyes can detect. This series was sparked by this hint - "beings of higher frequency"- and is named in honor of that peculiar 18th century scientist and mystic, Imanuel Swedenborg.

He kindly gave us permission to include a copy of one of his works in this sermon. Here is a breath-taking example:

Michael



I invite you to visit [Jeff's website](#), and let yourself experience his work as part of today's worship.

What do angels mean in your life?

This Advent, open your heart to the messages that angels are whispering in your ears. Be aware of the guidance that comes to you in dreams. Listen for your inner voice of wisdom. Ask for the guidance to be of help to others.

Christmas Peace

December 27, 2009

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 148

1 Praise the LORD. [a]
Praise the LORD from the heavens,
praise him in the heights above.

2 Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

3 Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars.

4 Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.

6 He set them in place for ever and ever;
he gave a decree that will never pass away.

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

9 you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

10 wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

11 kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

12 young men and maidens,
old men and children.



13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

14 He has raised up for his people a horn, [b]
the praise of all his saints,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.
Praise the LORD.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 286

286. First, we need to say where peace comes from. Divine peace is within the Lord, arising from the oneness of his divine nature and the divine human nature within him. The divine quality of peace in heaven comes from the Lord, arising from his union with heaven's angels, and specifically from the union of the good and the true within each angel. These are the sources of peace. We may therefore conclude that peace in the heavens is the divine nature intimately affecting everything good there with blessedness. So it is the source of all the joy of heaven. In its essence, it is the divine joy of the Lord's divine love, arising from his union with heaven and with every individual there. This joy, perceived by the Lord in the angels and by the angels from the Lord, is peace. It flows down from there to provide angels with everything that is blessed and delightful and happy-what is called "heavenly joy."(a)

a. In the highest sense, peace means the Lord, because he is the source of peace; and in the inner sense it means heaven, because people there are in a state of peace: 3780, 4681. Peace in the heavens is the divine nature profoundly touching everything good and true there with a blessedness that is beyond our comprehension: 92, 3780, 5662, 8455, 8665. Divine peace occurs in what is good, but not in what is true apart from what is good: 8722

MESSAGE

Christmas Peace



Christmas Eve; 1914. It was the first Christmas of the First World War.

Stanley Weintraub, historian, describes how he learned about it:

*In 1985 I published a book about the five days leading up to the Armistice in November 1918, [A Stillness Heard Round the World: The End of the Great War](#). While researching it I discovered the abortive informal armistice in 1914 that had bubbled up from the ranks on Christmas Eve. Although it clearly happened, and survivors had been on a BBC television documentary in 1982, the event had taken on the quality of myth. I determined to find out more, particularly to grasp the mythic power that the truce seemed to possess, and to examine it from both sides. I had begun my earlier book with the line, "Peace is harder to make than war," and as I worked on *Silent Night* that line became even more meaningful. Although I was working on other books at the time, including two on World War II and several biographies, every time I went to England or Germany on other research, I dipped into files of newspapers for January 1915, as troops mesmerized by the miraculous Christmas peace, a sort of waking dream they could hardly believe, wrote home about it. In those pre-censorship days, the letters were often sent on to local newspapers, which printed them. Then I went to the military archives. It was all real — even the football games (our soccer) in No Man's Land. I even found some of the scores.*

German troops put little Christmas trees with candles around the trenches, and began singing *Silent Night* in German. Other troops, in other trenches, began to sing carols in their own languages. By Christmas morning, soccer games were played, and joint services were held to bury the dead from all the countries.

Here is one folk song written about this incident:



The peace did not last long, however, The commanders knew that one cannot engage in war once the enemy becomes a human being. So the soldiers were ordered to start shooting again. For several days, much of the shooting was at the stars rather than enemy troops.

This amazing story from World War I is absolutely true, and you can follow any of the links to learn more about it.

What does it tell us about our lives today?

Peace is stronger than war. Songs are stronger than guns. Love is stronger than hate.

Look around you today. Look for the places in your life or in the world that are filled with hatred, violence, or greed. Find ways to bring the sunshine of Divine Love to the dark places of life.