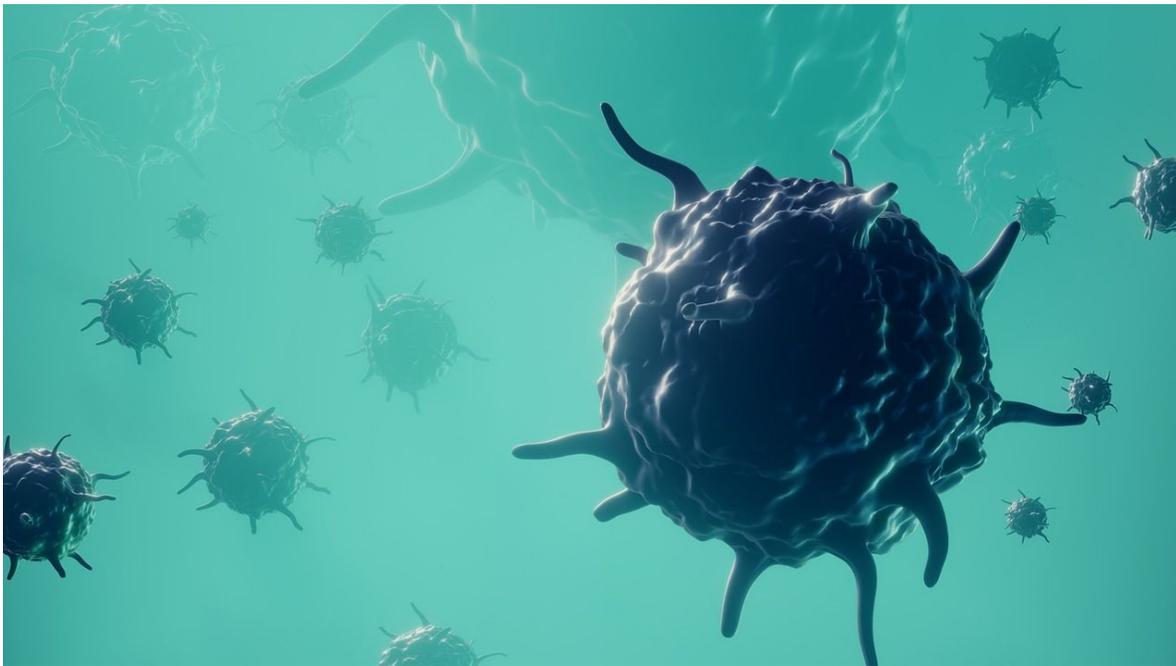




***Do Not Fear-
Remember the Basics***

-Rev. Kit Billings



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This week it became stunningly clear to all of us Americans that the worldwide spread of the Covid-19 Coronavirus is not just an epidemic on other shores, but that it's a serious threat to every part of our country. Worldwide it maintains a death rate of 3.5% according to World Health Organization statistics. Those most vulnerable to this virus are the elderly and those with chronic diseases such as heart and lung disease and diabetes.

Our church is doing a very good job of taking this "novel" coronavirus seriously, especially because our state and national officials are correct, that by our nation taking swift and drastic action now, we can stem the spread of this virus, hopefully preventing the chaos and death tolls that have happened in China and Italy. By following the protocols of safe-distancing, following safety rules and sanitizing our homes and vehicles (and basically hunkering down at home as much as we can for at least 3-4 weeks), we can work well as partners with God to fight off this pandemic.

Any time that we find ourselves in the middle of a difficult, fearful or trying time is the perfect time to center ourselves in our relationship with God. In fact, I would add that whenever I find myself in a difficult or stressful time that triggers feelings of fear, anxiety or worry, it's helpful for me to remember the basics about who and what God is, and how I can rely on the Lord to (yet again) pull me through.

One of the Lord's favorite commandments to us in His Holy Word is, "Fear not," or "Do not be afraid." I have read that the Bible says "Fear not" or "Do not be afraid" 365 times, which means that every day of your life God wants you to live unafraid, in favor of allowing our Lord's divinely loving peace and serenity to flow

through you. I think God means what He says when He tells us once for every day of my life *not to be afraid*.

However, that stat I mentioned is not actually correct. The truth is that God calls us not to live in fear many more times than 365! Think about it: there are many stories and verses that teach us to reject the way of fear and foreboding that use other phrasing. For example, *Psalm 23* is clearly about letting go of fear and worry, and instead trusting in the Good Shepherd to lead us to “lie down in green pastures and beside still waters.”¹ *Psalm 56* begins: “Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit; all day long they press their attack.” (vs 1). Is that not an awesome beginning to a psalm? Instantly I am transfixed!

As Swedenborgians we know that these verses have both a literal and an inner meaning in them. So, yes, one way of reading this could be, that all day long, every day, there are microscopic viruses swimming and buzzing around trying to find us. Some 2.5 weeks ago some of them found me, giving me a flu bug. But on the spiritual degree of life, this prayer is true for me also as I pray to the Lord, “Be merciful and good to me, Lord, for my spiritual enemies are in hot pursuit of me too; all day long they press their attack on me, pushing me to focus on my fears, anxieties and other worries as my top focus.”

But then the deeper truth is prayed by the psalmist: “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Ps. 56:3) This is the much deeper truth my friends, that

¹ Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

God's life-force or Divine Presence is a billion times more powerful than the spiritual influence of the hellish forces in life. For God is infinite Love and Wisdom itself! Everything and everyone else are mere recipients of life, mere mortals, only natural shadows in comparison to the Lord; and when God comes near the evil forces that are behind most of our fears and anxieties, they run for the hills. *They are overwhelmed by God's approach.*

Now, as a mortal person, yes...I am vulnerable to many things. But that's okay for me, because it helps me to appreciate and enjoy the many talents, gifts and powers that others have, and knowing that my physical body is mortal helps me to appreciate every day as a precious gift from the Lord. And as a spiritual being fashioned from God's life-force, I can take heart that no matter what may happen to my physical body, my spiritual body and being will never die—this is God's promise to us all.

Listen to the powerful truth of God's almighty strength and care for you when we read the wisdom of *Psalms 27*: "The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident." (vs 1-3) And in verse 5, "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock."

This, in part, is why daily prayer during fearful times is so crucial, as we meditate on God's Word—because the truth is revealed to my heart and mind that the Lord's

love and devotion to me (to everyone) is this powerful! When things feel like they are at their worst, or when trouble finds its way to me, or when life seems topsy-turvy, then I can stare those fears in their eye and be confident. For the Lord is my Light and my salvation, what or who do I really need to fear? No one. Nothing. Because my Divine Friend and Shepherd is the stronghold of my life, my refuge. “I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.” (vs 13-14) The truth in this psalm is awesome, really, as it reminds me that God’s Love is so real and strong, in times of trouble He loves to tuck me away inside of His secret place, His own tent of safekeeping. It also tells me that God’s goodness is often manifesting “in the land of the living.” I see this happening already in our world’s fight against the Coronavirus. For example, look at how well and fast nation’s and scientists and medical people are sharing information?

Our own CDC and the World Health Organization are producing much education and useful advice for us on how to combat its spread. Isn’t the teamwork, mobilization and caring for each other fantastic? And, I love it when God’s Love manifests through us when we choose to pray for one another, for ourselves, and for other nations too.

Our New Church theology helps us understand that literally *every kind of goodness that happens in life has its roots in God’s Being*. Only the Lord is Life itself, Love itself and all the Truth that flows from His Divine Love, which flows into and manifests on Earth. But when times get tough and stressful, then it can help me to remind myself of the powerfully good basics of who and what God is. This means I

need to learn and be clear in my mind what the basic nature, quality and strengths there are in God, so that it's easier for me to place my full trust in Him.

In *True Christianity*, Swedenborg states: “*The essence of love is loving others who are outside oneself, wanting to be one with them, and blessing them from oneself.*”² Think about that and meditate on it. It is God’s nature to love you. It’s not a decision He has to bribe Himself to do—loving fully is His Being.

We read that God’s love extends out toward all people and all things, both the good and the bad. Christ revealed this saying, “He [God] makes His sun rise on good people and evil people, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Mtt. 5:45) Furthermore, the Lord’s love for you is so good and so deep, that He always desires to be one with you, as shown in His prayer, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent Me.” (John 17:21) In Christ’s prayer He prayed for all of us and all people everywhere that we may feel unified in God’s love—one with God and with each other, so that His love may be felt in all of our hearts.

Further down into §43 in *True Christianity* Swedenborg wrote, “The third essential of God’s love, *His blessing others from Himself*, is recognizable in eternal life, which is the unending blessedness, good fortune, and happiness that God gives to those who let His love in.”³ God gives us the choice each day to let His love in. We can read further and enjoy an illustration or evidence of the truth that the Lord loves blessing

² Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan S. Rose. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2006.

³ Ibid.

others outside Himself. The Lord loves giving these and other blessings to us when we build a partnership with Him. In §44 we're helped to better understand the nature and sphere of influence from God's Love:

“The true nature of divine love is recognizable from its sphere, which pervades the universe and affects each of us in different ways depending on our state. That sphere of Divine love has a special influence on parents. Because of it, they tenderly love their children (who are outside themselves), they want to be one with them, and they want to bless them from themselves. The sphere of Divine love affects not only the good but also the evil, and not only people but also animals and birds of every kind.”⁴

So, if you want to have a simple grasp of God's sphere of love for you, mediate on your love for your children, grandchildren or children in general—that's how wonderfully God loves you, but even much more so. He is simply happy to be with you and to care for you. These are just some of the great qualities and goodness that God is, the One who is very glad to help you in times of trouble and difficulty. I will close with these pieces of information about our great President Abraham Lincoln during the bloody yet important Civil War.

While in the White House, Lincoln wrote out his private "*Meditation on Divine Will*":

⁴ Ibid.

"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party -- and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true -- that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By His mere great power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And, having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds."⁵[September, 1862]

He also said: "Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I will do." [September 13, 1862] And, "Amid the greatest difficulties of my administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance in God, knowing that all would go well, and that He would decide for the right." [October 24, 1863]

The goodness, wisdom and pure purposes and will of God are constant and never fail. Even when things outwardly appear to go poorly for us, like Lincoln, we can place our trust in the Lord and know that His providence continues and is always leading life toward the good and the true. During this worldwide pandemic, what perhaps are some of the good things you are seeing that are coming from this? The deaths and grief are hard to bear, but still we can have deep trust that our Lord works to

⁵ Lincoln, Abraham, Harold Holzer, and Thomas A. Horrocks. *The Annotated Lincoln*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

be in us and live in us and we in Him, and that He strives to bring forth blessings to us through these chaotic times. I perceive that this pandemic is drawing us all closer together, reminding us that real connection with one another does not require us to be face-to-face, but united and filled with and through God's Love.

Let us pray:

*Oh Holy One who is at the heart of life itself,
be with the leaders of all nations in a very special way.
Give them wisdom and foresight to act with charity and true concern
for the well-being of all the people they are meant to serve.
Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions
that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks.
May they know and feel your peace,
as they work together to achieve this on Earth.
Whether we are home or abroad, surrounded by many people
suffering from this illness or only a few, Lord Jesus Christ,
stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare.
In place of our anxiety, give us your peace, and,
heal us beautifully in body, mind and spirit.*

Amen.