



# *The Perpetual Sabbath*

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*May 2020*

So, we've certainly gone through a lot of changes regarding worship in the last couple of months, haven't we? Not just for us and our community but churches the world over. Virtual worship feels different, and has brought about both challenges and blessings. And so I thought that this week might be a good time to consider \*why\* we worship. Why did a whole bunch of places of worship go to the trouble to take worship online, why are you sitting down in your home in front of a computer to watch? What is worship for, and why is it so important?

Well, I'll begin by setting the stage with a couple of key Swedenborgian ideas about worship. First, as we heard in our reading: worship is not for God, it is for us. We don't ascribe to a God who needs our worship, it is not something we \*owe\* to God, it is not a transaction whereby we get what we want. Worship is for the purpose of our own growth. It is so that we might make space to, in a regular fashion, open ourselves up to new perspectives, to put aside preoccupations, to align ourselves with God's purposes. Swedenborg calls this being in a state of humility, which I think has modern connotations that might make it sound like a negative thing. However, it is not about being ashamed per se, but about being quiet, being open, being vulnerable. It is into those states that God can flow most easily, and help us to grow and change. And for many, worship of some kind or another brings us into that state.

Second, true worship is not necessarily about being in a church. Swedenborg also writes:

*...We worship constantly when we have love and charity; outward worship is merely an effect. Angels worship in this way, so they have a perpetual Sabbath.*

*-Secrets of Heaven §1618<sup>1</sup>*

So it is also an important thing in our tradition to recognize that the truest form of worship of God is living a loving, good, and kind life. Church worship is to serve this ultimate purpose. When we strive to live a loving life, then every day is Sunday, every moment is liturgy, every action a hymn. It has become a rallying cry to the world wide church the last few months, that church has never been about a building, and this is so very true. Church is about striving to be open to God in a way that connects us to love and kindness, to God's purposes, and to our fellow human beings. We do not \*have\* to have a building to do that. And so, in that vein, I thought I might read you something now that encapsulates this notion, something that I really love and that I have been waiting for an opportunity to share with you.

I would like to read to you the preface to the 1950 liturgy of the Swedenborgian Church. When I read it for the first time several years ago, it really moved me, and I hope that it speaks to you in a similar way. I've not been able to find out who wrote it (if you happen to know, please tell me!) but I love the idea of, when we are in challenging time for church, to intentionally ground ourselves in our tradition, to reach back for the

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<sup>1</sup> Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Secrets of Heaven*. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000.

wisdom of those who came before us, knowing that they are present for us, even now, in spirit. This preface is called "Let Us Worship."

*In all of us, there is a sense of what ought to be, which will not let us rest until we give ourselves and our all to its demands. It bids us rise above our lower nature, to seek the worth and meaning of life in our endless spiritual possibilities. It stirs our concern for all mankind and a better world. Whence that yearning, if not from a God whose love dwells in the inmost recesses of our souls and draws us to himself, fashioning us in his image and likeness?*

*We, Christians of the New Age, see this image in the Lord God, the Savior Jesus Christ, risen and glorified, now come again in the truth and power of his Word and urging us to match our lives and all our relationships with his Divine Humanity. As we look up to him, we cannot compromise with a lesser destiny. When in utter commitment we devote ourselves to the pursuit of his purpose, so that in us and our social order his Incarnation might be completed, and that his inner presence in the hearts and minds of men may illumine humanity from within and make it the glorious organism it is meant to be, then truly we bow down before him and say, "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand."*

*This is what worship is intended to bring about and intensify. Beyond the words we sing, within the words we pray, back of our standing and kneeling, as we listen in the silence of our hearts to the Book which "testifies of him," in presenting to him the tokens of our willingness, we dramatize, indeed, our dependence on him and our interdependence with all men as the objects of his care. We recognize, proclaim and rejoice in that, "He is*

*our God.” And so, through appreciation of his infinite mercy, worship becomes our experience of holy fellowship with him, and all he loves. Conscious of our shortcomings and sins, and our oneness with all men, we bare our lives before him; and, according to our sincerity and repentance, we receive the enlightenment and the strength to become his once again. We see in him what human life can be, the goal to which creation moves, and in the light of it our humblest strivings are given new significance. Worship is the actual thrill of receiving from him light and love and power for our daily task. It is the joy of being made by him, and, step by step, becoming better channels through whom his love may flow.*

*There is in that experience a rapture no words can express. Yet it does not always come easily. Often we hold ourselves back and forget that worship is essentially a response, an expression of love to a Person. Let us remember, in our praise and our prayers, our need of him, not simply of knowledge about him. We need his hand, which alone can lift us up in our full spiritual stature; the light of his presence; the glow of his companionship; the forgiveness of his compassion; the sound of his inner voice, if he is to send us, charged with power, to heal and comfort the bruised and broken heart of the world. For, though worship begins in one precious hour, it extends to the whole of life. It is opening our life to the Lord that He may work in and through us. It is staking our faith in the man that is to be, and the world that is to be, because of the God who is.*

Isn't that just gorgeous? What I love about it, is that it balances so perfectly the way in which human beings exist in both our individuality and our commonality. We, each of us, open our lives to God, so that we might become who \*we\* are meant to be,

which in turn contributes to the world becoming what \*it\* is meant to be, a vision of which God carries so tenderly in God's heart.

I don't know what is in store for the world-wide church, for \*our\* church over the coming months. Uncertainty is never fun. Difficult decisions might need to be made. But what I do know, is that our mission is to make space, if not physical then virtual, so that we might in community be moved by the spirit of our God in heart and mind, and then, as we read, *charged with power, we might heal and comfort the bruised and broken heart of the world.*

There is so much bruised and broken right now; may we always seek to live, to embody, the perpetual Sabbath.

Amen.

## *Readings*

### Psalm 29

1 Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. 11 The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Berean Bible* (BSB) © 2016-2020 by Bible Hub and Berean.Bible. Used by Permission. All rights Reserved.

Luke 24:44-53

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” 50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Secrets of Heaven 10646:3

It is said that the Lord alone is to be worshipped. Anyone unacquainted with the nature of true worship of the Lord may think that the Lord loves to be worshipped and desires glory from people, like someone who grants another person what he requests because that other person pays him respect. Anyone who thinks like that has no idea at all of what love is like, let alone of what God's love is like. God in His love does not desire worship and glory for His own sake but for that of people and their salvation. For humility exists in those who worship the Lord and give Him glory, and from those in whom humility exists...what belongs to self departs. And so far as this departs, the

Divine is received; for the...self, being evil and false, is the one thing that stands in the way of the Divine. This is the glory of the Lord, and worship of Him exists to that end.