



Cultivating Resilience in Times of Change

-Rev. Kit Billings

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Bible Readings:

Isaiah 33:2-6, Luke 24:36-49

From the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg:

“The Lord is present with each and every human being. He exerts insistent pressure on us to receive Him. When we do receive Him, which occurs when we acknowledge Him as our own God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, His First Coming occurs [in us], which is the twilight before dawn. From then on, we begin to be enlightened intellectually in spiritual matters and to grow into deeper and deeper wisdom. As we receive this wisdom from the Lord, we move through the morning into midday. The day continues into our old age until we die. Then we come to the Lord Himself in heaven.

There, although we died old, we are brought back into the morning of our lives, and the rudiments of wisdom that were planted in us while we were in the physical world grow and thrive to eternity. If we have faith in the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor, we are a church in miniature. The church as a whole is composed of such churches-in-miniature.”¹

-Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* §766-767

¹ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan S. Rose. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

Would you say that you are a resilient kind of person? If you are, where does your resiliency stem from? To me, our current reality and hardship with the Covid-19 Coronavirus is an important time for us as God's children to be reflecting about resiliency. I say this because we've been hit hard by this pandemic, as it has caused major disruptions of life on many levels—such as radically changing our normal ways of socializing, also in millions of Americans becoming unemployed, and most of all it has caused over 67,000 deaths in the United States alone and more than 244,000 deaths worldwide.

But even in the face of our heartaches, losses and griefs, most of us are still buoyant inside. Our “can do” spirit remains strong. When I look at God's Holy Word as a whole, I perceive that the greatest men and women of the Bible were not super-people, they did not wear capes, but what they had inside of them was resilience. To be resilient means that you have an ability to bounce back from defeats, discouragements, hardships or failures. Even when we go through an enormous loss of loved ones, the death of someone we love dearly, this deep-down power God gives us to pull ourselves out of bed in the morning and take steps forward into a new day lives within the marrow of our bones.

Are we feeling a lot of grief? Yes, we are. Are we going through times of serious anxiety, fear and stress? Yes, we are. From all I've read, heard and felt myself, I'd say unquestionably most Americans are struggling with these painful feelings and their accompanying thoughts. And yet, deep down inside of us, most of us still feel essentially buoyant inside. From a spiritual standpoint, we “never say die” folks are the ones who understand that life has many challenging times that come our way, but deep inside we know and believe that the One Almighty God who can “do all things through us” lives

within the core of our being, flowing through our hearts and our souls, and is actively helping us to perceive new ways of solving life's problems. In a sense, I feel, God's Kingdom of Heaven command center is actually helping us cope and even to grow and strengthen inside, as we are being led ultimately into the Light and Love of the Holy City New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven onto Earth.

Going back to our Old Testament Scripture lesson this morning, the imagery in the opening verses expresses so poetically for me why resiliency is part of our human DNA, as we read:

“O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you.

Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.”²

(Is. 33:2)

The prophet Isaiah was preaching to a nation of Israelite people who had failed in their chosen Covenant relationship with God. They crumbled time and again in their choosing idolatry over sincere love and faithfulness with the Lord, and as a whole they chose self-centeredness and hard-heartedness over charity and kindness toward their neighbors. But even in the face of such painful choices, those people were aware that God's love and mercy toward them was stronger than any sin or injustice they had chosen in life. I love this poetic and encouraging imagery, that when prayerful people rely on God, we are given the ability to wait on the Lord and not make hasty, rash decisions during hard times. And then this beautiful image is given in the next verse: “Be

² The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version*. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.”

In short, God is always willing to lend us His Divinely-Human arm to lift us up after we have fallen, enabling us to regain our balance and move forward in life again. I find many books in God’s Word touching upon and reflecting to us the spiritual grace and power of resiliency. I hear it echoing through the opening verses of Psalm 25:1-5,

“In you, O LORD my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

The ability to “bounce back” and ultimately to remain closely connected with God is shown in biblically heroic people, both young and old. Young and faithful servants of God are found in Joseph, in the young Queen Esther, and in the young, brave Hebrew heroes in The Book of Daniel. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (later to be known as Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) faced enormous hardships and murderous rage in the Kings of Babylon and Persia. But instead of caving in, these four young heroes remained focused on their primary love and duty toward the Lord. Among other conquered people in those ancient days in the Near East, these four young men were considered to be among the best and brightest of the Hebrews. But rather than tarnish their faith and Covenant with God, Daniel and his friends refused to do things like eating the king’s choice foods and wine. Interestingly, Daniel does not refuse the training of the king or the use of a new name, but he drew the line at the

eating of the king's food because it was a public declaration of dependency on the king. Daniel and his friends did not want to rely on Nebuchadnezzar, but only on the Lord.

In chapter six, where we find a new king ruling the throne of Persia, King Cyrus, who ordered everyone under his rule to bow down to him daily in prayer, worshipping a golden statue erected in the image of Cyrus for all to honor. We read:

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” (Dan. 6:10)

No matter what befalls us, we can still choose each day to kneel before the Lord in gratitude for His blessings on and around us. In this epic story, backstabbing spies and soothsayers working for Cyrus tattle tailed on Daniel, which led to the king ordering them to be thrown into a fiery furnace heated to seven times its normal temperature. But in response to the king these four young and resilient men said to him,

“King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” (Dan. 3:16-18)

This is what the power of the Lord's Divine Love and Wisdom growing within us does to help us remain focused on where life's deeper spiritual purpose resides---that

no matter what may unfold on Earth, we all are born to become good and heavenly people, being strengthened and formed for our eternal home in Heaven, after death---servants of all that is good and true.

In conclusion, as a whole, resilient people are filled with an overcoming attitude that expects God to use them regardless of their handicaps and weaknesses. Resigning oneself to defeat is not a normal response for a resilient believer because we know that God is greater than any problem and His mighty power working through all of us enables people to do what God asks them to do to get the job done, or to even just to put one foot in front of the other trusting in God to lead the way. The potential for resilience is not a unique trait that one has or does not have; the capacity for resilience is inherent in all people. Resilience is neither lucky nor passive. Often it takes deliberate effort, making a choice to serve my God and my neighbor more than myself.

We see the immense and unconquerable resolve and goodness of resiliency shown most of all in the willing spirit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who said to His disciples on Easter morning, as they received God’s saving arm to lift them up:

“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. This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”³

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(Luke 24:44-48)

Truly, my friends, by far our greatest fortitude and strength during hard times flows into us from our Divine Savior, who as our theology tells us:

“The Lord is present with each and every human being. He exerts insistent pressure on us to receive Him. If we have faith in the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor, we are a church in miniature. The church as a whole is composed of such churches-in-miniature.”

(Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* §766-767)

And the foundation of God’s divinely made and mystical church in us cannot be moved nor destroyed---in fact it gains new strength from the Lord as we regenerate in Him, who fills us

“with justice and righteousness; and He will be the stability of your times, and the abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge...” for all eternity.”

(Is. 33:5-6)

Amen.