



OUR DAILY BREAD
Resources for Spiritual Questers

Fear Neutralizer

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*A sermon delivered at Wayfarer's Chapel, the National Monument to Emanuel Swedenborg
in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA*



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Readings

Psalm 116

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.
 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
 I suffered distress and anguish.
 Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray, save my life!”
 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.
 The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.
 Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
 For you have delivered my soul from death,
 my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
 I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.
 I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted”;
 I said in my consternation, “Everyone is a liar.”
 What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?
 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,
 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.
 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.
 O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
 You have loosed my bonds.
 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.
 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,
 in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Luke 24:13-49

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”²

² Ibid.

Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* §89

“It is the law of divine design that the closer and closer we come to God, which is something we have to do as if we were completely on our own, the closer and closer God comes to us. When we meet, God forms a partnership with us.”³

³ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Arcana Coelestia*. Translated by John Elliott. London: Swedenborg Society., 1983.

The Roman philosopher Tacitus observed, “The desire for safety stands against every great and noble enterprise”. Please do not get me wrong, I have a healthy regard for caution when needed, but this statement lends itself nicely towards living an authentic spiritual life in the here and now. Too often we can find ourselves clinging to outdated life-patterns that are not necessarily our own. It is great to have formation and guidance but at some point, we step out into the uncertainties of life on our own and take that great leap of faith into the unknown.

It is a sentiment that somehow lends itself to the line from Psalm 116, “I walk before the Lord in the land of the living”. In this great mystery of life, none of us here know with absolute authority how our next moments of life are going to go, let alone years or decades. What we can control and deepen is our relation to this moment and to the living God and how we respond to life events. This practice that can help to forge an authentic walk before the Lord in the land of the living. It also shifts the phrase of Tacitus from a desire for safety to one of who dwells in the shelter of the most high (Psalm 91:1). It is an invitation to continue our dialogue with the Lord who can see around the corners of life and to share this conversation with others along the journey.

In an era where social media and a steady stream of commentary is shared online that would never be said face-to-face with another human being, it is refreshing to examine today's scripture and tease-out the intensely personal way that the resurrected Jesus interacts with those who knew him in human form. It is a timeless message and an invitation to us all to be more compassionate with one another through the challenges of living in this physical dimension.

There is another aspect to this scripture passage that also emphasizes the importance and value of engaging with another human at a deeper level of existence. The invitation to become spiritually transformed through that dynamic experience where something ineffable is exchanged between us. It

is like spiritual fire leaping out from our physical heart, corresponding to that pure divine love that is unstoppable and unquenchable for those ready to receive it. It is also a reminder that as valuable as it is to have time alone, the real spiritual work is with the ‘other’ and the exchange that takes place only in community. These concepts were modeled by our Lord, amplified through the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and most recently Pope Francis has become an important advocate for talking the talk and walking the walk of what we are all called to be in this world as disciples of God. Last week Pope Francis echoed this same sentiment using the platform of a TED talk calling for a, “Revolution of Tenderness”.

It can be all too easy these days to get caught up the fears of the day. Why is it that we allow ourselves to be frightened and to allow doubts to arise in our hearts? Most of us can find ourselves in this scripture story quite easily where our doubts get stirred-up and our fears get exploited. The resurrected Jesus on the way to the village of Emmaus models a way of being spiritually present with our fellow human travelers. Appearing once again in Jerusalem to his disciples he asks, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”. These words were spoken from Christ-Consciousness in the vertical dimension of time and strike through the millennia, piercing our modern day hearts and sensibilities anew.

The mystery of the resurrection is something that we continue to wrestle with just as the original disciples did. The challenge of remaining in a loving space and not giving in to fear is a very real thing and it does require constant rigorous spiritual discernment on our part. Who do we allow into our hearts and how can we not get pulled into the fury and frenzy of fear?

The propagation of fake news and polarizing hate groups we have witnessed here in the United States and abroad are reminders of how easy it can be to succumb to fear and for that fear to be

exploited. The other mystic and scientist Albert Einstein reminds us all of the value of not getting pulled down to lower spiritual realms with his quote, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it".

So let us revisit this story and examine how the resurrected Jesus enters into it. It is interesting to note the approach that Jesus takes in joining the travelers. It is a very gentle and subtle movement that initiates the partnering of the two on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus as we search the scripture. "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?'" Notice how Jesus joins the travelers and is there with a listening ear and an active curiosity about what their experience is regarding recent events. It is a model of infinite patience, tenderness, and a listening, compassionate heart that the Lord enters into their dialogue while traveling along the road. Upon registering the question they are described as standing still and looking sad. Cleopas then goes on to describe all the powerful events in detail from the past several days.

Notice how it took this moment of patient inquiry to unlock the emotions residing within Cleopas? This is one of the great travesties of our modern world. People are so rushed and in a hurry that we rarely encounter these moments with another human being who is waiting patiently with compassion to find out what is really going on within us. As we notice in this passage, it is this spiritual presence and gentle inquiry that contains the power to unlock the inner dimensions of the heart. Even through this journeying with them, the resurrected Jesus does not force the issue of his presence with the two men as they approach the village. Jesus continues on down the road and would

have kept going had he not been encouraged to stay a little while longer. Swedenborg has something to offer in this matter in regards to how divine design operates.

“It is the law of divine design that the closer and closer we come to God, which is something we have to do as if we were completely on our own, the closer and closer God comes to us. When we meet, God forms a partnership with us.” - Swedenborg, True Christianity 89⁴

This law of divine design shows up in the way that the risen Lord enters the scene on the road to Emmaus and engages in initiating the conversation with compassion and curiosity. Of course we know that the risen Lord knows what has happened and within it lies a deep spiritual lesson here to learn as well. The lesson of attaining inner spiritual stillness when engaging in dialogue with another person and connecting to that deeper level of our soul within ourself when attempting to relate deeply to another human being. When we meet at that level, a true partnership is formed where it is not just two or three of us gathered together. This ‘other’ holy presence has joined in the partnership as well. The Holy Spirit or Divine Proceeding is now able to be felt when we have these sacred moments with another.

In our scripture story, we also notice a gradual progression of how the Lord appears to travelers on the road. First, it is as a complete stranger, joining in the conversation with curiosity and questions about recent events and yes, he does chastise them a bit for being a bit too, ‘Slow of heart’ and not picking-up what he was spiritually laying-down. But it worked! That exchange of dialogue was enough of a real conversation that the travelers decided to invite the Lord to stay for dinner. Enough

⁴ Ibid.

of a partnership had transpired and been reignited in that short journey to move them to an open dinner invitation. It is here at dinner where the Lord finally reveals his true identity. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight”.

Another important lesson for us here is that it is in within that moment of recognition, the Lord vanishes from our sight. The Lord has once again accomplished what he set out to do and is on to other important matters, such as appearing to the disciples and reminding them not to freak out that this amazing thing has happened. Jesus said, “Peace be with you...Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”. Fears can cloud our judgement and get in the way of seeing one another clearly. Through the deepening of our relationship to the living God, we can rest in deep assurance and thereby neutralize our fears. We glorify the Lord whenever we gather together in this fashion.

This understanding is universal and I believe is why Pope Francis felt compelled to go live on TED and describe in great detail his own understanding of how this process works. In his words, “The Revolution of Tenderness” is simply the recognition that there is this sense of the sacred within each of us and we need to feel that connection in order to relate deeply to another human being. Only then are we also acting in the world like the change agents of transformation that the Lord calls us to be. In this fashion, we are clothed from up on high. May the Lord so help us all.

Amen.