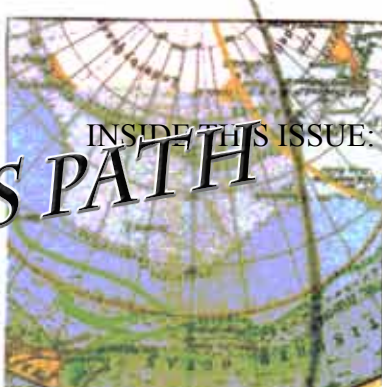
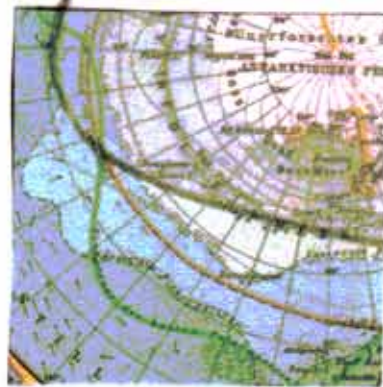
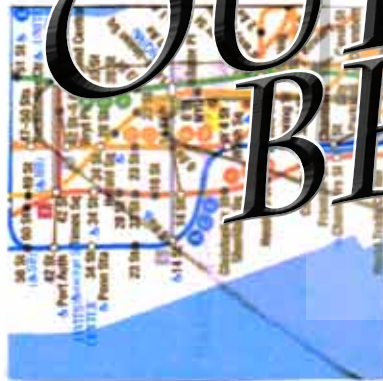


SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD



FOLLOWING GOD'S PATH

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Prayer

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by you or laid aside by you, enabled for you or brought low by you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine, and I am yours.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

- John Wesley, 1703-1791

Dear Readers,

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The Lord’s summons is not for the faint of heart. Following God’s path takes many, many forms, each of them challenging in its own way.

Our August/September issue takes its readers on a bit of a new journey, as our weekly meditations are slightly different from those of prior issues. We have divided August and September into two types of journeys. The former is an examination of our theme using Psalm 119, and the latter explores part of the journey of the tribes of Israel as they make their way to Mt. Sinai. This issue’s cover, created by Anna Berezina, is a collage of various maps (including one of the Tokyo subway and an antique map of that most extreme of destinations, Antarctica).

Perhaps we’re not always as stouthearted as we might wish to be when it comes to following God’s path. But don’t forget: His yoke is easy and his burden light, and those who make their ways toward him will find rest for their souls. It is our prayer for you that, amid the challenges of life’s vicissitudes, such peace may be yours. May you seek and behold the Lord’s beautiful face.

Many blessings,

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

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Good of Truth & Truth of Good

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1 AUG

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and

she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Over the past weeks we have been talking about the loss of understanding and truth that occurs when we separate love from wisdom, which is best understood by thinking of a book as a paperweight rather than something to be read: While the book still has some use, it has lost its ultimate good (being a repository for information, a good story, and so on), and a mediate use (holding down papers) has replaced it. We've also talked a little bit about realizing that this separation has occurred.

We now arrive at today's focus, which is one of the most important steps we must make in spiritual growth: the step between knowing and being, or the step from the external to the internal. What do I mean by "the external to the internal"? It is the difference between the location of control and reward for a specific action.

Before we get there, however, I must go over two terms with you. I usually like to avoid jargon in my sermons, but today I think it is best to mention these two bits—not only so that you can understand what I am talking about, but also so that you can use these two bits of information as filters for attempting to understand your actions. The two terms are “the truth of good” and “the good of truth.”

The “truth of good,” in our theological tradition, is the rational awareness that a certain action, behavior, or thing is a charitable or loving act. For instance, at Almont New Church Summer School’s camp session this year (where I am the camp director) we had the wonderful gift of a fantastically gifted crafts director—she’s an artist—who had never been to camp before. She took up the gauntlet without any real instruction or indoctrination into Almont camp life, and decided that she wanted to do more than entertain the children: She wanted to help the kids work on the moral development that the adults’ morning lectures and classes were also focusing on.

So she asked the kids, “How do you feel when you get a gift?” Of course, they all liked receiving gifts. So every day, she encouraged the young ones to make a craft project to give as a gift to someone—a wonderful lesson.

The inhabitants of the little girls’ dorm, however, focused a good deal of their attention on me. Not only are the walls and surfaces of the minster’s cottage now covered with crafty gifts, the various girls also got into a competition over which one of them would give me the best and coolest art project. When receiving their gifts, I was reminded of the human journey; each little girl would broadcast how good she was because of how many gifts she had given me or how superior her particular gift was.

Don’t get me wrong: I rejoiced in their desire to give. Yet during these gift presentations my thoughts would invariably shift to how much farther we all have to journey. How many adults give so lavishly and with such joy? But the girls’ competitive fervor was a bit unnerving.

On to the good of truth: Put briefly, it is the experience, feeling of call or purpose, or joy we feel when we have done something good. It is the realization that we have fit into the grand design and made a difference. It is the feeling we get when the Lord is letting us know that we are working in the flow of divine providence and fulfilling our purpose in life. It is the sense of completion felt when we realize that the Lord is working through us.

The good of truth is the feeling preachers get when they speak with their congregants after a service and learn that their message really hit the spot—or touched a nerve. The

preacher may think, “That isn’t exactly what I meant to say, but the Lord used me and my message so that this person could hear what they needed to hear.” Or (how’s this for a different image?) it’s the feeling you get when you use a cotton swab to clean a grungy crevice around the faucet rather than just wiping the surface. It is the difference between the feeling a person gets from a job well done and a job merely finished. And ultimately, it is the difference between pride and humility. In short, the good of truth is going the extra mile because it just isn’t right if you don’t.

When Joseph and his brothers were separated by that little issue of their selling him into slavery, the other eleven brothers were left incomplete. Famine hit the land of Israel. Only when Joseph and his brothers were reunited did the people of Israel rejoice and flourish. The twelve brothers are God’s people, who give rise to the twelve tribes of Israel; they represent the beginning of the church. Anything in the Bible relating to them or to the twelve tribes has to do with our own spiritual lives or the life of the church. In this morning’s reading, the people of Israel have started to flourish in Egypt, but a new king has ascended the throne. The pharaoh sees Joseph’s and his brothers’ descendants as a threat, and so he enslaves them.

Slavery is about control and domination—actions of selfishness, actions that stem from the hells gaining control of our actions. If this story is talking about our faith life, or the life of the church, how exactly does slavery come into play? Slavery is our desire to use our faith and what we know to be true to manipulate things into the shape of our own design. It can also manifest itself as a prideful belief that one is spiritually better than others, or that one’s religious tradition is inherently truer or better than another’s.

You see, when you believe you know the truth, it is inevitable that it will quickly descend into pride. We can strut around thinking how much better off we are than “those people.” How great it is that we own so much of the riches of the world! But like the tribes of Israel, while we seem to be flourishing, we are actually descending into slavery, because the life-giving force that has brought us to this point has ceased being the core of our being. Our own benefit, our pride, has replaced it.

It’s worth pointing out, however, that this prideful arrogance is a “mediate good”—it’s a step along the journey that, though not ideal, helps us grow spiritually—think of those little girls at camp who were fighting over who was the best and most giving. Pride in our own goodness and rightness is an important step, a growth point. It lets us understand reward on a more visceral level. We must

When you believe you know the truth, it is inevitable that it will quickly descend into pride.

identify what we think truth is and live by it out of desire for external reward in order to internalize it.

The truth of good is the stage before the good of truth, and it is a sticky stage. We read this morning that the infant Moses was placed in the ark and set in the reeds while his sister Miriam stood by to watch over him, so that Moses' mother would not be permanently separated from her son. When the daughter of Pharaoh found Moses, Miriam was there to offer help her find a nursemaid. The nursemaid was her and Moses' mother.

Moses symbolizes the law of God. Both he and the Ten Commandments the Lord later gives him are put into an ark, a protective vessel, for safekeeping. In this story, Moses, the law, is being raised by the family of Pharaoh—which means that the laws of the church, in their infancy within us, are used and raised for our purposes, for our sense of meaning and happiness. This is all right, as long as we use this self-serving perspective of God's truth as a temporary growth point. But, as the story tells us, the mother is nearby. We are nursed and nourished by the awareness that God's truths are deeply good, and not just because we like to be right. The law of God, our sense of what is righteous and true, is a part of us that we elevate to a special place. It allows us to be nursed and nurtured by the good that comes from the truth.

If we adequately nurture the value we put on following the messages we find in scripture, we transition into the good of truth, as Peter does when he realizes that Jesus is the Lord. The faith that Peter demonstrates comes not from simply knowing what he has learned and obeying what he has been told. He knows that Jesus is the Lord because he has received the Word from him, acknowledged it, and found that its truth has begun to enter his will. God's truth is shaping Peter's desires and actions.

When we know the law and take pride in living by the law, we are not quite there yet. When we boast about how ethical we are, or that we have attained enlightenment, we have ceased to grow, and pride in our accomplishments has taken over. When we think we understand and know God's law and truth, we cease to have the humility it takes to truly live by it. The form is there, but the substance is not.

How often we might see someone whom we find self-righteous and prideful and condemn them! When that opportunity presents itself, let us instead use it as a reminder that we are all journeying toward the goodness that lies at the heart of God's law.

Prayer

Loving and most gracious God, we know that it is in obedience to your work that we begin our journey toward a deeper and closer relationship with you. Open our hearts and our minds, that we might be brought from obedience to true love of your law. Rid our hearts of domination and control, so that room might be created for your love and freedom to enter into our lives. May we ever realize that only in your life does true happiness reigns. In your most holy and blessed name, Amen.

Websites for Sermon Preparation:

Textweek: A rich lectionary resource site that contains links to study tools and Bible readings. <http://www.textweek.com>

Kempton Project: A website that cross references the Bible with Swedenborg's works. <http://www.kemptonproject.org>

Heavenly Doctrines: A website for searching Swedenborg's writings and other collateral works.

<http://www.heavenlydoctrines.org>

Blue Letter Bible: Offering commentaries and lexicons, a website for doing biblical research. <http://www.blueletterbible.org>

The Tafel Lectionary Project: Housed on the Swedenborg Chapel website, the Tafel Revised Common Lectionary Project is a three-year cycle of Bible and Swedenborg readings. Go to the chapel website and click on "Worship Resources."

<http://www.swedenborgchapel.com>

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 2

Happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the Lord.
Happy are those who keep his decrees,
who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways. *Psalms 119:1-3*

Walking and journeying are movements of people,
and therefore refer to the progression of life, that is, the
progression of the thought from the intention of the
will. *Arcana Coelestia 687.5*

Tuesday, August 3

You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!
Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
Psalms 119:4-6

[Human rebirth progresses] from the outer to the
inner, that is, from the truth of faith to the good of
compassion. The truth that belongs to faith is outward
and the good of compassion is inward.
Arcana Coelestia 3870

Wednesday, August 4

I will praise you with an upright heart,
when I learn your righteous ordinances.
I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me. *Psalms 119:7-8*

If the truth that belongs to faith is to live, it must be
brought into our intentionality in order to receive life
there. The true does not, in fact, live by knowing but
by intending: through a new intending that the Lord
creates within us, life flows in from him.
Arcana Coelestia 3870

Thursday, August 5

How can young people keep their way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes. *Psalms 119:9-12*

The first life shows itself in obedience, which is the
first form of intentionality; the second shows itself
through an affection for doing what is true, which is an
advanced intentionality that exists when delight and
blessedness are felt in doing what is true.

Arcana Coelestia 3870

Friday, August 6

With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.
I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word. *Psalms 119:13-16*

Everyone is born with bodily awareness and then
comes into sensory awareness, awareness of the
natural world, and eventually rational awareness; and
... becomes spiritually aware. *Marital Love 447*

Saturday, August 7

I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your
ordinances before me.
I cling to your decrees, O Lord; let me not be put to
shame.
I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge
my understanding. *Psalms 119:30-32*

The reason for this progression [from bodily to
spiritual awareness] is that the earlier stages form
planes that higher stages rest on, the way a palace rests
on its foundations. *Marital Love 447*



The Best-Laid Plans

Rev. Eric Hoffman

Rev. Eric Hoffman is the pastor of the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul, Minnesota.

8 AUG

2 Chronicles 29:1-12, 15-17

Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done.

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. He said to them, "Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place. For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the Lord, and turned their backs. They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not offered incense or made burnt-offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the Lord came upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. Our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. My sons, do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him."

Then the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi, and Azariah son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah, and Eden son of Joah. They gathered their brothers, sanctified themselves, and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the

Lord; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord; then for eight days they sanctified the house of the Lord, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

John 1:35-51

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you come to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

King Hezekiah and Jesus of Nazareth had at least one thing in common: They had a plan.

For Hezekiah, this plan was formulated out of necessity. During the years of his reign, the kingdom of Assyria was extremely strong—and extremely intolerant of anyone who challenged its authority. Hezekiah had to operate in an unstable environment. The mighty armies of Assyria were constantly challenging the equally mighty armies of Egypt in his own backyard, and alliances between rulers of all the little kingdoms surrounding Hezekiah’s kingdom of Judah were constantly shifting. Hezekiah watched rebellion after rebellion arise, only to be quelled by Assyrian forces. During the first years of his reign, Hezekiah stayed out of the thick of things and was regarded by the Assyrian king as an insignificant player. But, as many of us know who have been in or even near dysfunctional groups of people, we can’t remain aloof forever. It wasn’t long before Hezekiah found it necessary to lead an insurrection against Assyria.

The story of what happened can be found in the book of 2 Kings, but I don’t intend to tell that story now. Instead, I wish to talk about one of Hezekiah’s strongest qualities as a ruler: He knew how to plan. In preparation for a siege against his capital Jerusalem by the Assyrians, Hezekiah upgraded the water delivery systems of the city. One improvement he made is called “Hezekiah’s tunnel,” considered a remarkable engineering achievement to this day. It feeds the Pool of Siloam, where hundreds of years later Jesus healed a man who couldn’t reach the waters because of the crowds. Another important part of Hezekiah’s plan was, as we heard today, to cleanse the Jerusalem temple. The people of Jerusalem had let the temple fall into disrepair, and Hezekiah believed that in order to strengthen his community they needed to rededicate themselves to their religion. He coaxed the Levites out of their complacency and put them to work cleaning the temple and rededicating themselves to a regular system of worship. Hezekiah also hoped that making the temple a source of strength again would attract Judeans from the surrounding countryside and convince them that Jerusalem was worth defending. Hezekiah had a plan.

Theologians have been wondering and debating the nature of Jesus’ plan for centuries. Swedenborg maintained that Jesus set out to teach people (or to remind them) that divine love was real and present within them and that, with the application of divine wisdom, they could improve their lives. The traditional version of our Adoramus states that Jesus Christ “overcame the hells and so delivered us.”

Being Swedenborgian myself, I would tend to agree, but regardless of the specifics of the Lord’s plan, I would like to emphasize my belief that he had a plan. I have a difficult time believing that he sort of made things up as he went along. I say this because he collected disciples. After the formal beginning of his ministry, signified by his own baptism, he deliberately sought people who were willing to follow him and let themselves be taught in the ways of heaven. If there was no plan, then why seek out disciples? I think it is entirely possible that Jesus realized the task that needed to be done would take far longer than his time on earth. He knew that God’s work would require people who would carry the message after his time on this earth was completed. Jesus the teacher, by the time he was thirty years old, had a plan.

Most of us would agree that having a plan is a pretty important part of starting any project, but it is amazing how many of us choose to spend most of our days making things up as we go along. In today’s culture, we are repeatedly encouraged to have a financial plan, so that we can retire someday and provide for our children’s education. We are called upon to plan our workday so that important tasks are completed in a reasonable amount of time. Whole organizations are devoted to family planning and investment planning and curriculum planning. We are familiar with the concept. If you have spent time formulating a plan to guide you in these areas of your life, then wonderful! Bear in mind, though, that the same principles that guide us in managing these external aspects of our life can also be applied to our internal, spiritual growth.

By this, I do not mean to suggest that our spiritual life needs to be as rigorously managed as our checkbooks, although there are some who would say it’s an idea worth trying. Being primarily right-brained, I find great delight in the unplanned, spontaneous times of my life. But it is also true that many people sort of stumble through their spiritual growth and as a result find themselves going in circles in their lives and falling into ruts. We can apply some of the same principles that have proven so helpful in organizing our external lives to provide a kind of jump-start to our development as spiritually centered and spiritually effective individuals.

I am deliberately giving you homework in this sermon, as always, whether you do it or not is entirely up to you. But if you feel a need for change in any area of your life, this simple exercise will help.

Jesus set out to teach people (or to remind them) that divine love was real and present within them.

First, select a spiritual project. Focus on some aspect of your spirituality or the exercise thereof that you would like to change, but haven't quite gotten around to. This may be a relationship that needs healing, or a question you've always wondered about, or a spontaneous reaction to something that has gotten you into trouble in the past. Right now could be the time for you to make that change once and for all. Then find a brilliantly colored piece of paper on which you can record the thing you want to change in your life. It is important that you write it down, because so often we human beings make casual commitments to change that are soon forgotten; making a visual record is a continuous reminder to us that we are in the midst of a deliberate effort to change. Put two Xs in the top corners of the paper, because that's where you put your refrigerator magnets. Pick whatever color you want for your sign—the important thing is that it needs to capture your attention every time you walk by it.

In many cases, a change (or any project) is too big to accomplish in one fell swoop. In fact, humans tend to put off the really big projects because they are just too much to cope with all at once. But current effectiveness theory teaches us that we need to break those big projects down into smaller tasks or steps, so they aren't so overwhelming. Think about, and write down, smaller tasks that can be done in order to bring about the larger change. If it's a behavioral change you seek, start out by identifying what situations elicit the behavior you want to overcome. If you want to heal a relationship, start small. If it's a change in your level of knowledge about something, find a book on the subject and commit just a few minutes a day reading it. Make certain that the smaller tasks you write down are 1) not so imposing that you will never get around to them, and 2) directly related to the larger change you want to make.

Once you have your goal and tasks written and pinned up in a place where you won't just forget about them, then do them. What's more, do them with joy in the knowledge that your life will change for the better. One of the things I have always admired about Swedenborg is his resolve to find answers to the questions he asked. I can't find any evidence that, after he began his spiritual work, he ever doubted that his life would change for the better.

Lastly, I would like to call your attention to the fact that the chances of our success in this endeavor are more than doubled when there is someone else cheering us on and holding us accountable to our commitments. And let us all be reminded that Hezekiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and a whole host of other people throughout history that have made significant changes for the better in this world have incorporated the Lord, in the form of spirituality, focused discipline, and a loving, hopeful attitude, into their daily living.

Hezekiah had the Assyrians. Jesus had the Pharisees and the Romans. We all encounter factors in our life that are beyond our control and that seem to impede our work and our progress. Even the best-laid plans are often opposed by something. But never doubt that, with the Lord's love and the support of our loved ones, we are more than capable of improving our lives and our world. Centered in love and wisdom, nothing can prevent our success. Amen.



The sanctuary of the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul, MN.

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 9

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. *Psalm 119:33-34*

Wisdom and love flow the Lord as a sun and flow into heaven, generally and specifically, which is where angels receive their wisdom and love. They also flow generally and specifically into this world, which is where we receive our wisdom and love.

Intercourse between the Soul and the Body 14

Tuesday, August 10

Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. *Psalm 119:35-37*

But while [wisdom and love] emanate from the Lord united and flow united into the souls of angels and mortals, they are not received united into our minds. Light is accepted first there, which forms discernment; and love, which forms intentionality, is accepted gradually. *Intercourse between the Soul and the Body 14*

Wednesday, August 11

See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise.

Psalm 119:40-41

This [separation of light and love, or wisdom and goodness] is from providence because we all need to be created anew (that is, re-formed), and this is accomplished by means of our discernment.

Intercourse between the Soul and the Body 14

Thursday, August 12

Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me, for I trust in your word.

Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your ordinances. *Psalm 19:42-43*

In our rebirth, our first state is a tranquil one; but as we are making the passage into the new life, we pass also into a state of disturbance. The evil and false things we have absorbed in the past are coming out, eventually with such force that we are caught in trials and harassments by the hellish crew, which is trying to destroy the state of our new life.

Arcana Coelestia 3696:2

Friday, August 13

Your statutes have been my songs wherever I make my home.

I remember your name in the night, O Lord, and keep your law.

This blessing has fallen to me, for I have kept your precepts. *Psalm 119:54-56*

Still, at the deepest level, we have a state of peace. Unless this were at our deepest level, we would not fight. *Arcana Coelestia 3696:2*

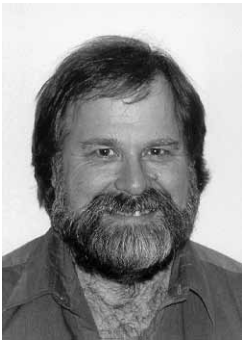
Saturday, August 14

Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law.

At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous ordinances. *Psalm 119:61-62*

We are actually focusing on [this deep-seated peace] as our goal throughout the struggles in which we are involved, and unless it were our goal, we would not have the energy or the strength to fight.

Arcana Coelestia 3696:2



Things that Plague Us

Rev. Ken Turley

Rev. Ken Turley is the president of the Swedenborgian Church. He served most recently as pastor of the Fryeburg New Church in Maine.

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Exodus 5:1-2

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’”

But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go.”

John 8:31-35

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’” Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.

Today’s topic is not a very pleasant one; it is about things that plague us. In general, we are good people, but we are not perfect people, and things plague us. And in general, this is a beautiful world, but it is not a perfect world, and things plague us. In both realms there are small, not-so-serious things that just annoy us, and then there are the deadly serious things that continue to hurt and even destroy us. These things that plague us are different kinds of evil and sin, and the pain and oppression and destruction that they cause. These things that plague us are also in the denial, rationalization, and self-deception that allow the hurt to continue.

I think it is not coincidental, but rather providential, that long after we had planned this topic for today, it came to my attention that October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. Domestic violence is truly one of the deadly serious things that continue to plague us, as individuals and as a society. So with these things in mind, let’s look at today’s lesson.

In the Old Testament Scripture reading we heard God’s word to Moses to go tell old Pharaoh “Let my people go.” As we know, eventually Moses was able to break the bonds

of slavery and lead his people into freedom. What we didn’t hear was the story of the ten plagues that afflicted the Egyptians as a result of Pharaoh’s denial of God, hardness of heart, and refusal to change.

In the New Testament reading we heard Jesus promising the people that if they believed in and followed his word, the truth (meaning his teachings made real in their actions) would make them free. And we heard the people denying that they had ever been slaves, conveniently forgetting about all the times they had in fact been enslaved, beginning with the Pharaoh “who did not know Joseph” and continuing right on through the Babylonians, the Philistines, and all the other nations who had conquered them, carried them into exile, and forced them into servitude. Because, of course, this always happened as a result of the people’s own choice to turn away from God and do what was evil—and of course they didn’t want to think about that.

The one bright spot in all of this is that with perseverance Moses was able to break his people out of bondage and lead them on the long and difficult road toward a return to God. And there is Jesus’ not-so-subtle reminder that sin—the conscious choice to do what is evil—is the true source of slavery. And in this we are told how the cycle of evil is broken: we must change our behavior. It’s simple to say, not always so simple to do, but it is the truth.

So as we turn to our scripture lesson, let me begin by stating the obvious: There is not much point in reading scripture if we do not apply it to our own lives. If we do not use it to examine critically our own actions, our own beliefs, what’s the point? In fact, it is one of the strategies of evil to respond to anything that is said by turning the spotlight on somebody else: “Oh, look how bad they are! Of course that doesn’t apply to me.” But scripture, when read with a humble heart and a desire to hear and respond to the word of God, has a way of speaking what we most need to hear.

Jesus had a way of talking in parables and what seem like vague generalities because he was aware that evil is a matter of degree. Beliefs and behaviors that seem unimportant—too unimportant to bother with—have a way of growing, with repetition over time, into evils that hurt people. So he speaks in ways that apply to the big, serious sins that few people are engaged in and even fewer are willing to admit to, but also to the little sins that most people are engaged in and almost no one wants to admit to.

But as we will soon see, while few people in this room would ever consider themselves guilty of domestic violence, most of us have engaged in, and probably continue to engage in, the kind of thinking and actions that are milder forms of abuse, oppression, and yes, violence. By “violence” I mean not just physical hurts, but things that hurt feelings and restrict freedom of thought and speech, things that do damage to a person’s sense of well-being, things that hurt the spirit. So then, as we attempt to draw out the meaning of these scripture passages, get ready to apply them to the seemingly insignificant patterns of behavior in your life as well.

Let’s look at Moses for a moment. We read in the Exodus story about his resistance to confronting Pharaoh: how he did his best to wriggle out of the responsibility placed before him, how he was overcome with a sense of inadequacy in the face of the confrontation required. Is that not something that we all feel when faced with a necessary confrontation? Whether we must confront someone else—maybe someone we know and love—or must confront the behavior of that person in the mirror, most of us would just rather not. We come up with all kinds of reasons why we shouldn’t, why we should put it off, why someone else ought to do it. It is a natural reaction.

Perhaps that is why God was so patient with Moses, why he responded to every objection with some kind of assistance, why in the end he gave him the verbal boot in the pants that he needed to get on with what was no doubt going to be a difficult task. Let’s take some comfort from this scene. When we are faced with confronting evil, we need not do it alone. God is with us, and not just in the form of our belief, but because he acts through all kinds of people who are ready to provide support, guidance, and resources to help us in our difficult task. All we have to do is ask. Hey, if Moses had the nerve to stand there and ask God for some help, surely you and I can muster the courage to ask the people around us whose purpose it is to be of help! And remember also that once Moses got started, he did a pretty good job of it—that is, as long as he remembered who was actually running the show.

Let’s get down to the nitty-gritty. If you want to know how evil grows and takes hold of a person’s life, and how it responds to being confronted with the truth, all you have to do is study the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh and the ten plagues that result from Pharaoh’s refusal to change his behavior.

First off, Pharaoh denies the existence of God. In fact, he seems to rather enjoy the fact that he doesn’t know God, or care about him. In his mind, there is no one more

important than himself—and what is more, he doesn’t need anyone else. That is Pharaoh’s first big mistake, and the first indication that there is something seriously wrong here. If you are confronting evil anywhere, listen for that voice of Pharaoh—the denial that anything of importance or power exists outside the self. Pharaoh represents knowledge, and there is nothing that so obstructs spiritual growth as too much knowledge. Moses, on the other hand, represents truth—knowledge, yes, but knowledge that has as its foundation the goodness of God and the practical information that speaks directly to our behavior and its results. Think of it this way: Pharaoh represents knowing all about theology, philosophy, psychology, and the human potential movement, and reveling self-righteously in that knowledge. Moses represents the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule and the commitment to live by them. You do the math.

How does evil grow in power so that it takes over, consumes, and eventually destroys a life? Simply look at the progression of the ten plagues as symbolic of our inner spiritual dynamics. It is a litany of the qualities and consequences of choosing to continue in evil behavior—in other words, the life of sin. It goes like this:

First, all the water is turned to blood: Truth is made false; useful information is turned into hypocritical rationalization; what was once life-giving is made useless and disgusting.

How does evil grow in power so that it takes over, consumes, and eventually destroys a life?

Second, frogs come up out of the rivers and cover the land: Out of reasoning comes the enjoyment of arguing; what provided helpful and creative life now becomes the source of an overwhelming mass of selfish pleasure and distorted thinking.

Third, the plague of lice from the dust: The mind becomes infested and inflamed with selfish physical desire; the lust of satisfying the desire to do evil agitates a person’s thinking.

Fourth, swarms of flies: Out of these evil desires is born a cloud of falsity; from the sensual desires that inflame the senses comes a confusion of false thoughts that irritate and distract from any sound or good purpose.

Fifth, the death of the cattle from disease: The presence of inner evil begins to destroy any outward signs of goodness; good feelings and actions in the natural level of life begin to die out as a result of the infestation of evil thoughts and feelings.

Sixth, boils on the skin: The spiritual disease within begins to show outwardly in signs of self destruction; pain

and ugliness begin to appear on the surface, revealing the presence of evil within.

Seventh, hailstorms and resulting fires: Falsity and lust destroy good and truth; distorted thoughts and perverted feelings inhibit the growth of any good and true impulses.

Eighth, locusts eat the crops: Inward evil destroys outward good; the inward love of power over others is expressed outwardly, resulting in the destruction of what gives life.

Ninth, darkness covers the land: No truth remains; a person is no longer willing or able to see anything of truth or goodness, the soul is completely darkened with evil.

Tenth, death of the firstborn: The gift of the spirit is dead; all love in the heart for God and others is lifeless, resulting in the death of the ability to give anything good.

I expect you will find all of that somewhat overwhelming and pretty depressing. Maybe that's because it is. And unfortunately, too many people, having made themselves slaves to some kind of sin and clinging to their own love of power, force themselves and those around them through that litany of evil and destruction. And just as often, it takes truly hitting bottom for them to let go and seek help from a higher source.

Even when the bond is broken and the first steps toward a new life in freedom are taken, the desire for power will reappear in a last attempt to regain control, just as Pharaoh, after setting the Israelites free, changed his mind and went after them with his army of chariots. That is why anyone caught in the downward cycles of evil, when they have broken the pattern and escaped the behavior, must destroy its hold over them completely and never return to that place again—something that cannot be done without the help of God and the human resources provided by him.

Even though most of our lives are plagued with the minor stuff, the process of evil is the same. Maybe our bondages are to things that are not illegal or overtly harmful; maybe our violence is only expressed in words; maybe our love of power over others is only expressed in jokes or subtle remarks or manipulations behind the scenes. Still, the patterns are the same. And if allowed to go unchecked in ignorance or apathy, they will ultimately lead us down that same road to destruction.

We usually hear about domestic violence only when it results in beating or killing. Yet it begins when a husband forbids a wife to do anything by herself without his permission. It has already begun if he uses words to demean, stifle, humiliate, embarrass, or otherwise control

her; if his wants, satisfaction, and convenience are the only things that matter, and when not met are responded to with rage; if he demands her undivided attention, and acts as if she is subordinate; if he requires her to neglect her mental, emotional, spiritual, or career development because he wants her to keep “his” house clean and “his” meals hot. Physical oppression and violence begin with the love of power and control and violence to the spirit. It is evil, and when we choose to continue doing it, it is sin. And domestic violence is one of many sins that continue to plague us. In the words of Jesus: “Those who commit sin are the slave to sin.”

So what do we do?

We heed the words of Jesus and the actions of Moses. We must acknowledge the presence of God and respond to the call to embrace goodness and confront evil. We must listen and hear, and then act accordingly. That is the truth that Jesus speaks of.

If you look into your own heart, you will hear God's call. And when the fear and the resistance start and the rationalizations begin, recognize the beginning of the process, and ask for help. It will be provided. The only thing that seems to annoy God is procrastination! Certainly education is an important part of the healing process, but information alone is not enough. The truth is made real only when it is put into action. As Jesus said, “The truth shall make you free.”

Prayer:

Lord, our lives are so often confused and disoriented by the various tasks of our day. Open our eyes, that we may rise above the self-interest and selfishness that distracts us from doing your will and leads us to do violence to others. We know that only through your love we can confront the evils in our hearts. Guide our will, that our hands may follow, and that we may glorify your name by being more fully the angelic spirits we have been created to be. Amen.

We must acknowledge the presence of God and respond to the call to embrace goodness and confront evil.

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 16

I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes. *Psalm 119:63-64*

When we are being regenerated by the Lord, it is like this: At first, we are involved in what is true but not in any goodness of life because it is true. Next, we are involved in goodness of life as a result of what is true but not yet as a result of what is good.

Arcana Coelestia 6396

Tuesday, August 17

Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.

Before I was humbled I went astray, but now I keep your word.

You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. *Psalm 119:66-68*

Finally, when we have been reborn, we are involved in goodness of life because of what is good; then we become aware of the true and multiply it in ourselves because of what is good. *Arcana Coelestia 6396*

Wednesday, August 18

The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. *Psalm 119:72-73*

I have been told by angels that the Lord's Word is a dead letter but that, while it is being read, it is brought to life by the Lord in accord with each individual's ability. It comes to life according to [a person's] life of compassion and state of innocence, with immeasurable variety. *Arcana Coelestia 1776*

Thursday, August 19

I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.

Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant.

Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. *Psalm 119:75-77*

. . . [T]he Word is a general vessel recipient of spiritual and heavenly things, and thereby unites heaven and earth. *Arcana Coelestia 1775*

Friday, August 20

My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word.

My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes. *Psalm 119:81-83*

When [people] are being re-formed [that is, reborn], they are brought into ignorance of what is true or loneliness, even into pain and hopelessness; . . . only then do they receive comfort and help from the Lord. [This is so that] the second-hand faith they have tried to maintain for their self-image may be broken . . . and that they may accept some perception of what is good and true. *Arcana Coelestia 2694:2*

Saturday, August 21

If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery.

I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. *Psalm 119:92-93*

People cannot accept [the Lord's goodness and truth] until the second-hand faith derived from their self-image has been softened, so to speak. No one can grasp with full sensitivity what is good, what is blessed and happy, without having been in a state of not-good, not-blessed, and not-happy. *Arcana Coelestia 2694:2*



How To Be King

The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole

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Deuteronomy 17:14-20

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," you may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You must never return that way again." And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

True Christianity 405

There is a love of power that comes from loving our neighbor and a love of power that comes from loving ourselves. People who have a love of power that comes from loving their neighbor are ambitious for power for the purpose of benefiting both the general public and individual citizens. In the heavens, in fact, power is entrusted to people like this. If emperors, monarchs, and generals who were born and raised to be leaders humble themselves before God, they sometimes have less self-love than people who come from a lowly family and whose pride makes them long for superior status over others.

On the other hand, people who have a love for power that comes from loving themselves use love for heaven as their footstool. They put their feet on it in view of the crowd. If there is no crowd in sight, they either toss it in the corner or throw it out the door. Why? Because they love only themselves. As a result, they plunge the willing and thinking of their minds into self-absorption.

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple, and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. (Mark 11:11)

This has to be one of the most anticlimactic lines in all of literature, sacred or secular. Centuries of pent-up longing and frustration have just been released. The promised Messiah, the heir to the throne of David, has finally arrived. There is a triumphal procession, with all the traditional trappings of the return of the conquering hero. This hero goes straight to the very heart of the true Israel, straight to the temple itself, to the mountain that will be exalted over all others, where all nations will flow seeking to learn the ways of the Lord. He looks around and says, "It's getting on toward bedtime. Let's go home."

How not to seize a moment: preach a fiery sermon, get everybody shouting “Amen, brother!” Get everyone ready to sing “Onward, Christian Soldiers” at full volume, ready to charge out the church doors and change the world, and then announce, “We will close our service by singing hymn number 378, ‘Now the Day is Over.’”

It reminds me of a little incident that took place in a movie theater quite some time ago—probably not long after 1953, in fact. The film was *Roman Holiday*, in which Audrey Hepburn had the role of a European princess on a state visit to Rome who gets tired of the whole princess business, opts out for a while, and takes up with a foreign correspondent played by Gregory Peck. They get along together wonderfully well, but eventually she hears the call of duty and goes back to being a princess again. In the closing scene, you see her back on the job, winding up her visit to Rome with a formal thank-you speech to quite a crowd, with Gregory Peck somewhere toward the back; as the scene fades and the credits start rolling, he is just turning to leave. Well, the lights in the movie theater went on at that point, and an utterly bewildered woman near me stood up and said, “What happened?” The movie’s ending broke all the rules. If a beautiful princess meets a handsome commoner and they fall in love, there’s only one way it can end. I suspect that if the author of that script and the director of that scene could have heard that reaction, they would have been absolutely delighted.

I can’t help thinking that the crowds went home that first Palm Sunday night saying, “What happened?” This wasn’t in the script. I can’t help thinking that the author of that script and the director of that scene would also have been delighted. In both cases, we have people who take it for granted that they know the answers, that they know how things work. In both cases, these people have clear images of “happy endings” that miss the mark. These images are very dear to them, and no amount of rational argument will address the emotional roots of their dreams.

The worldly way to deal with this problem is to rewrite the script, but the Lord’s way was simply to present people with a blank page. This could have one of two effects, or perhaps both.

One is the effect illustrated in the movie story. It could start people asking questions, and asking questions is the necessary first step in learning. This is the creative doubt that is so persuasively advocated in *Secrets of Heaven* 7298.2, the doubt that prompts us to look at both sides of a question when we are inclined to leap to a conclusion. The correct answer to the question “Am I missing something?” is usually “Yes.”

It could also prompt them to see that the blank page was really blank, that they had been writing on it dreams of their own imagining. Here there is something very, very basic involved, again something that requires us to see both sides. On the one hand, what the Lord has in mind for us is “unwriteable,” unimaginably more beautiful than anything we can dream up for ourselves. On the other hand, if we do not stretch ourselves toward our dreams, we will never get anywhere at all.

Robert Browning’s lines come to mind: “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” What this implies but does not say outright is that “heaven” is a moving target. If it comes within our grasp, it no longer exceeds our reach. It leaves us with nothing to aspire to.

Perhaps the stress belongs on the word “should”—“a man’s reach should exceed his grasp.” If we set realistic goals for ourselves, our focus is on attaining them. We measure our progress against a fixed point, so to speak, and we are frustrated if we do not reach that point. What the Lord would have us do makes far more sense. It is to discover the joy of reaching out, the joy of stretching.

We have at this point not strayed as far from the Palm Sunday story as it might seem. The crowds that lined the way into Jerusalem were drawn there by their dreams of the restoration of Davidic glory. These were illusory dreams, true. What the Lord had in mind was not the material and therefore transient kingdom of Israel but the spiritual and therefore everlasting kingdom of God—treasures in heaven, “where moth and rust do not corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal” (Matthew 6:20). They were illusory dreams, but they brought people to that roadside. There were thousands of others, we may be sure, who did not come to the roadside for the simple reason that they had given up on their dreams.

Perhaps life is a little like a trapeze act. We have to hang on to the bar that is swinging us in the right direction, and we have to let go of it in order to catch the next one. If we let go too soon or hang on too long, we can only hope that the net is in place.

Jesus knew that it was time for Israel to let go, to let go of its dreams of material empire. Those dreams had served their purpose remarkably well. Over the centuries since the call of Abram, empire after empire had come and gone—Sumerian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Hittite, Persian, Greek. Countless other little nations had had their day in the sun—Moab and Ammon and Edom come to mind as examples. Only Israel remained intact. There is something very special about the particular dreams that

Perhaps life is a little like a trapeze act. . . . We can only hope that the net is in place.

shepherded such a minor player on the international scene through all the great upheavals of the centuries.

What was special was the relationship of those dreams to the Lord's dream. The core of Israel's sacred scriptures was the law, the Torah. Inseparable from that law were the Prophets—the "former prophets" telling their stories of empire building and the "latter prophets" calling for justice and mercy. The tensions between the law, the vision of empire, and the vision of the peaceable kingdom are woven through the whole fabric of Israel's long history.

How could they be reconciled? Think of the picture of the victor coming from Edom with splendid robes spattered with blood in Isaiah 63, and then, in Isaiah 11, of the peaceable kingdom in which the wolf will lie down with the lamb and a little child shall lead them. History makes it painfully clear that regimes established by violence maintain themselves by violence. History also makes it clear that this tactic does not work. Hitler built the world's most formidable military machine, but his "Thousand-Year Reich" lasted only from 1933 to 1945, and that's stretching things. Terrorists are simply not fit to rule. They don't know how to do it.

What they don't know is the most basic fact of all: that real, enduring power is essentially generous. When our theology tells us that the first law of divine providence is that we should act in freedom and in accord with reason (Divine Providence 71-99), it is saying that the whole intent of omnipotence is not to control us but to empower us.

There are two sides to this principle. One is giving us the freedom and resources to do the things that we can, and the other is restraining us from courses of action would destroy that freedom. In a way, the central theme of Holy Week is that the restraint is always for the sake of the freedom, not the other way around. In fact, one essential characteristic of true power is self-restraint. A muscle car out of control is simply self-destructive, and what is "powerful" about a pile of wreckage?

No, the key to real power is very clearly identified in that matchless discourse about the good shepherd in the tenth chapter of John. "This is why the Father loves me—because I am laying down my life in order to take it up again. No one is taking it from me. No, I am laying it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17-18).

That's real power. We might think back to the third of the temptations in the wilderness. Satan, we are told, showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their wealth, and said, in effect, "I'll give you all these if you'll just make a

few compromises." Jesus is on that same mountain when has the crowds in the palm of his hand. If any crowd was ready to hear the message, this one was it. Who could resist such a temptation? So he just goes home to bed. That is how to be king.

How many times do we have to be told before we hear it? "Anyone who saves his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will find it" (Mark 8:35; see also Matthew 10:39 and Luke 9:24).

Apparently, though, words are not enough to get the message across. Truth is not just something to be spoken; it is something to be done. Think of the statement about losing one's life for the sake of the gospel, and then think of St. Francis' purported injunction, "Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words."

Jesus was "preaching the gospel" when he actually declined to "use words" and simply went home to bed. He was preaching that same gospel when he went to the cross. That is how to be king. Words simply do not do that gospel justice. Amen.

Prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, you search us and you know us. In our hearts and in our minds we strive constantly, but not always fruitfully, to bring your love more fully into this world. Free our minds of the doubts and roadblocks that stop us from embracing the fullness of our being as creatures in your likeness and image. Help us know when to speak and when to keep silent. Give us the humility always to seek your truth rather than claim it for ourselves. Amen.

*Truth is not just
something to be spoken;
it is something to be
done.*

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 23

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I receive understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
Psalm 119:103-105

Few [read the Lord's Word] with a view to being taught about the truth. Most of them just remain within their own dogma and simply work to confirm it from the Word. The only people who are involved in an affection for the truth are those who love to be taught about what is true . . . and who search the scriptures with this end in view. *Arcana Coelestia 4368:2*

Tuesday, August 24

I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.
Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. *Psalm 119:109-111*

No one is involved in this affection [for knowing what is true] except those who are involved in what is good—that is, in compassion toward the neighbor—and even more so those who love the Lord. For them, the good is flowing into the true and producing the affection, since the Lord is present in that good.
Arcana Coelestia 4368:2

Wednesday, August 25

Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope.
Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually. *Psalm 119:116-117*

The Word is divine primarily because each and every detail is not focused on a single nation or a single people, but on the whole human race—on what has been and what is to be. In a more inclusive sense, it focuses on the Lord's kingdom in the heavens; and in its highest sense, it focuses on the Lord himself. This is what makes the Word divine. *Arcana Coelestia 3305:2*

Thursday, August 26

Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold.
Truly I direct my steps by all your precepts; I hate every false way. *Psalm 119:127-128*

Having doctrinal tenets based on the Word does not mean that these tenets are divine truths, since all kinds of doctrine can be gotten from the Word—false ones as readily as true. . . . But this does not happen if the doctrine is formed by the inner meaning.
Arcana Coelestia 7233:3

Friday, August 27

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.
With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments. *Psalm 119:130-131*

A mind cannot be enlightened apart from a belief that love to the Lord and compassion toward the neighbor are the first and foremost principles of the church. People who proceed from an acknowledgment of these principles, if they abide within them, see countless truths, an abundance of hidden things disclosed . . . *Arcana Coelestia 7233:3*

Saturday, August 28

Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your custom toward those who love your name.
Keep my steps steady according to your promise, and never let iniquity have dominion over me.
Psalm 119:132-133

[These hidden things disclosed] come from an inner recognition that depends on the reader's level of enlightenment from the Lord. *Arcana Coelestia 7233:3*



I Walk in Beauty

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell is a minister at the Wayfarer's Chapel in Palos Verdes, California.

29 AUG

Isaiah 52:1-12

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more. Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter Zion! For thus says the Lord: You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money. For thus says the Lord God: Long ago, my people went down into Egypt to reside there as aliens; the Assyrian, too, has oppressed them without cause. Now therefore what am I doing here, says the Lord, seeing that my people are taken away without cause? Their rulers howl, says the Lord, and continually, all day long, my name is despised. Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Matthew 6:19-34

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! "No one can serve two masters; for

a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

"I walk in beauty." Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to say this to ourselves continuously as we walk through our days? Wouldn't it make a wonderful affirmation? There is a well-known Navajo chant that offers this affirmation quite powerfully.

"Beauty is before me and Beauty behind me.
Above me and below me hovers the beautiful.
I am surrounded by it, I am immersed in it.
In my youth I am aware of it, and, in old age,
I shall walk quietly the beautiful trail.
In beauty, it is begun,
In beauty, it is ended.

I love this chant because for me it evokes the beauty of the Creative Spirit that pervades the beauty of the physical universe—a beauty that is indeed above, below, and all around us. Beauty is a great and sacred power. Its appeal upon us is direct and immediate. It can stop us in our tracks, take our breath away, render us speechless. Beauty can soothe us, ground us, heal us. All true beauty, I believe,

derives from the beauty of God's goodness, and that beauty, too, has an immediate appeal to us. As we open ourselves to God's love for us, as we get in touch with that part of our souls which is profoundly in love with God, we find ourselves surrounded by inner, spiritual beauty.

When I reflect on the mix of beauty and ugliness that currently exists in the world around us, I am left deeply puzzled. Given beauty's attractive sway over us, why don't we walk in beauty every moment of every day? How have we become surrounded by so much ugliness—physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual? Why are our cities so full of blight? Why is the landscape so trashed and polluted? Why are we so prone to ugly thoughts and ugly feelings? Why is there so much shabbiness in what we say and do? And when we turn our thoughts to God, why do we so often approach our Maker in fear and shame? Why do we not find ourselves running—spontaneously, eagerly, joyfully—into the embrace of the beauty of the Holy One?

Part of the answer, surely, is to be found in one of the sayings of Jesus we read this morning:

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.”

The ugliness that surrounds us, I believe, has its root in a certain kind of inner blindness. “If your eye is healthy, your body is full of light.” If we see the beauty of God's goodness and God's love for us, if we see that within us that has always been deeply in love with God and longs to return to God, we are filled with love. We see the world through the eyes of that love, and we set our priorities accordingly; we seek first to serve God and neighbor.

But “consider whether the light within you is not darkness.” If we look at the world through the eyes of fear, greed, and delusion, we will come to see it in terms of our own self-interest, as this is most narrowly defined. We will be led to put our own comfort and security first, and ignore the impact we are having on the whole. We will see ugliness in the world around us, and, perhaps unwittingly, contribute to the ugliness as well.

We will not continuously and consistently walk in beauty, until we have recovered our inner, spiritual beauty. Our reading from Isaiah this morning can be read as a symbolic expression of this process. “Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city.”

In Isaiah, there are two levels of meaning. At one level, the prophet is talking about the actual city of Jerusalem of

his own time. But he is also talking about our own inner, spiritual reality. Jerusalem is the holy city and Zion a hilltop stronghold within Jerusalem. Symbolically, Jerusalem and Zion refer to that part in us that rises up to meet God. Isaiah is calling on this part of us to awake and to put on its “beautiful garments.”

Given my job here at Wayfarers, the phrase “put on your beautiful garments” makes me think of the beautiful garments people put on for their wedding day. This beauty, moreover, is an outward manifestation of the inward beauty of a couple's love, a beauty which is usually clearly visible for all to see. In memorial services too, people often bring in a display of photographs of their departed loved one. These may include formal photographs taken in beautiful garments, but they also usually include casual, candid shots that allow a unique personality to shine through. They are made beautiful by the love with which the departed person is remembered. The face of an old friend is a beautiful sight—whether or not the friend is conventionally handsome or beautiful, whether or not he or she is glamorous by mass-media standards. The friend is made beautiful in our eyes by the love that is shared.

The passage continues: “For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter you no more. Shake yourself from the dust, rise up, O captive Jerusalem, Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.”

At a literal level, circumcision was and is the male rite of membership in the Jewish people. The unclean is that which is set aside under Jewish ritual and kosher law. Symbolically, we are being promised the removal of all that is unworthy of our higher selves and that obscures our inner beauty. To shake off the dust is to shake off all trivial concerns and worries, all small-minded and selfish feelings and thoughts. To be free of them is indeed to be freed from captivity.

A few lines later, Isaiah continues: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news.”

It seems strange today to talk about a messenger's beautiful feet. Mountains, however, are symbolically the places where heaven and earth meet. “Messenger” in Hebrew is also the word for “angel.” Our feet are the part of us that touch the ground. The feet of the messenger on the mountain, then, comprise the point of contact between heaven and earth, the place where they communicate. And thus they are beautiful. In ancient philosophy, and especially in Plato, outer, physical beauty was seen as continuous with inner, spiritual beauty. This seems to have been true of the Hebrew Scriptures as well. In the early centuries of Christianity, physical and spiritual beauty came to be seen as in opposition. In the Swedenborgian

tradition that guides us here, we have come again to see physical and spiritual beauty as in harmony. The design of Wayfarers Chapel itself is an expression of this idea. Its glass walls and ceilings invite us to focus not on human works but on the works of God. Looking at the beauty of creation, we see the beauty as well of the Creator.

Today I give thanks to the Holy One for bringing me here to work in a place of great beauty and peace. And beyond that, I thank the Holy One for allowing me to witness

the inner beauty that this sacred place makes visible in the wayfarers who come here—those who come here for prayer and meditation, as well as for all those who come here for baptisms, marriages, or to remember the departed. And I thank the Holy One for the beauty of all of you who come here to worship. I pray for myself and for all of you that the Holy One may kindle in us the true light, allowing us to see the inner beauty of all of those around us. May we all ever walk in beauty!

Notables Comment on Swedenborg's Writings

Walt Whitman (1819-1892). The leading American poet of the nineteenth century, Whitman was profoundly influenced by the work of Emerson. He was also influenced by Swedenborg, who, he wrote, “will probably make the deepest and broadest mark upon the religions of future ages here, of any man that everwalked the earth.” It has recently been argued that his most famous work, *Leaves of Grass*, was deeply influenced by the doctrine of correspondences as expounded by Swedenborg. Reference: Anders Hallengren.

D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966). Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki was an internationally known Japanese Zen Buddhist scholar. From 1897 to 1908 he lived in the USA, where he met his future wife, Beatrice Lane (who had studied under William James, among others). It may have been through her that he first encountered Swedenborg’s works. He translated *Heaven and Hell*, *The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines*, *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *Divine Providence* into Japanese and was a vice president of the 1910 International Swedenborg Congress. He also wrote a long essay on Swedenborg, *Swedenborugu*, in which he described him as “the Buddha of the North.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968). “Swedenborg enables us to understand why we were created, why we are alive and what happens to us after our bodies die. Swedenborg enables us to have the best possible understanding of God’s message as it exists in those Bible books which constitute God’s Word.”

William Butler Yeats. “It was indeed Swedenborg who affirmed for the modern world, as against the abstract reasoning of the learned, the doctrine and practice of the desolate places, of shepherds and midwives, and discovered a world of spirits where there was a scenery like that of the earth, human forms, grotesque or beautiful, senses that knew pleasure and pain, marriage and war, all that could be painted upon canvas or put into stories.”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning. “To my mind the only light that has been cast on the other life is found in Swedenborg’s philosophy. It explains much that was incomprehensible.”

Daily Meditations

Monday, August 30

Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your precepts.
Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.
My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept. *Psalm 119:134-136*

The only way anyone can be prepared for heaven is by insights into what is good and true—therefore, only through being taught. For no one can know what is spiritually good and true and what is evil and false . . . without being taught. *Heaven and Hell 512*

Tuesday, August 31

With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O Lord. I will keep your statutes.
I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees. *Psalm 119:145-146*

Teaching in the heavens is different from teaching on earth because insights are not committed to memory but to life, since spirits' memory is in their life. They accept and absorb what agrees with their life and do not accept, much less absorb, what does not agree. *Heaven and Hell 517*

Wednesday, September 1

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I put my hope in your words.
My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. *Psalm 119:147-148*

The Lord is present with everyone, urging and pressing to be accepted. And when we accept him (which happens when we recognize him as God, the Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator), this is his first coming, which is called the dawn. *True Christian Religion 766*

Thursday, September 2

In your steadfast love hear my voice; O Lord, in your justice preserve my life.
Those who persecute me with evil purpose draw near; they are far from your law.
Yet you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true. *Psalm 119:149-151*

From this time on, we begin to be mentally enlightened concerning spiritual matters and to move into ever deeper and deeper wisdom. *True Christian Religion 766*

Friday, September 3

Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your justice. *Psalm 119:156*

As we accept this wisdom from the Lord, we come [from dawn] through morning into daytime, a daytime that lasts through our old age all the way until our death. *True Christian Religion 766*

Saturday, September 4

My lips will pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.
My tongue will sing of your promise, for all your commandments are right. *Psalm 119:171-172*

After this, we come to the Lord himself in heaven, where, even though we may have died in old age, we return to the morning of our life; and the beginnings of wisdom that have taken root in the natural world grow to eternity. *True Christian Religion 766*



Finding and Following

Ms. Eli Dale

Ms. Eli Dale preached this sermon at the Elmwood New Church on January 19, 2003.

5 SEP

Both our scripture lessons today are about call. God calls, “Samuel, Samuel,” and once Eli explains what is going on (it takes him awhile to figure it out), Samuel dutifully answers and the rest of his life is changed. In the New Testament lesson, Philip invites Nathanael to “come and see”—see the Master for himself. In the Old Testament lesson, we are told that Eli cannot see—his eyesight, his inner vision, his ability to connect with the Master is gone. He cannot see for himself, and Samuel’s first unhappy duty in his new life as a prophet, instituted when he is still a boy, is to prophesy against his teacher. Call is about finding and following. And it requires the ability to see.

An evangelical will ask you, “Have you found Jesus?” The scallywag answer is, “No, but I’ll help you look for him. Where do you think you lost him?” There is some confusion about who is doing the finding, but the difference between the finder and the found is very clear in this passage. Our New Testament passage offers a good example of the difference between truth and the appearance of truth. Truth is what God really does and how the universe really works, and appearance is how it seems to us what God is doing and what we are doing and how the universe really works. Here it says, plain as day, “Jesus found Philip.” But in a few lines, we have Philip explaining to his friend Nathanael, “We have found the one who is written of in the Law and the Prophets.” That is, “We have found the Messiah.” So because of the difference between truth and appearance, it’s really not all that wrong to say “Have you found Jesus?” or “We have found Jesus;” but the truth of the matter is that Jesus is finding us.

The conundrum is: How do you know when you’ve been found by Jesus, by the Lord, as opposed to having been found by your own misdirected dysfunctions or by evil spirits or just by some random bad idea? How do you know? I will tell you right now not to expect me to give a definitive answer to that question, because I don’t really know; but it is worth exploring together.

I would like to back up the New Testament lesson by a few verses, because the call of Philip and Nathanael is preceded by the call of Andrew and Simon, and I think it helps to have this larger picture.

The next day John [the Baptist] was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which when translated is Peter).
(John 1:35-42, NIV translation)

Note that the same kind of error happens here. Andrew claims to have found the Messiah. The difference in this passage is that Jesus didn’t find Andrew; Jesus was pointed out to Andrew by John the Baptist. John’s ministry was to point to Jesus. Andrew follows the point, and when he asks, “Where are you staying?” Jesus says, “Come and see.” Andrew brings his brother Simon to Jesus. Then Jesus finds Philip and says, “Follow me.” Philip finds Nathanael and says, “We have found the Messiah.” Nathanael says, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip says, “Come and see.” Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus.

Call is about finding and following. Jesus is about finding and following. When Jesus finds us, the lost sheep, we think we have found him. But what is it we think we have found? Also, there are surely times when we go looking for the Messiah ourselves—I have, and I’m sure you have too. When we come to church with a questioning heart, or search scripture, or pray in earnest, or try to figure out what is behind some event, or reach for some deeper meaning for our very existence, or simply decide we want a more spiritual life, we are searching for divine truth, for the Christ. How can we be sure of what we have found? How can we tell the difference between divine leading, the forces of hell, and indigestion? Might the Christ we think

we have found really be psychosis or wistfulness? All we can do is “come and see.” We must observe and reason about what happens next, but by what measure will we reason? Do we even have the capacity to recognize Jesus?

We also need to question our reason for needing to find the Christ. Do we want to get into heaven? Are we engaging in hero worship? Are we simply too timid to rely on our own God-given reasoning abilities and looking for a Daddy Jesus to make our decisions for us? Are we the victims of bad teachers who have sent us off looking for the wrong thing? Have we misunderstood some fundamental truth about our relationship with the Divine?

When first-century Israelites found Jesus and recognized him as the Messiah, they made a fundamental error in identifying who and what they found. They had expected a king, an earthly king, a warrior king who would throw off the oppressive Romans and allow the Jewish people to function as a sovereign, independent nation state. Never mind that prophets had been explaining for centuries that being a sovereign, independent nation state was not what God had in mind when the promise was made, “I will make of you a great nation.” In their minds, the liberation that the Messiah was to effect was already known to be liberation from foreign oppression. Even the disciples had a hard time grasping how much bigger the liberation would be. When all you want is for the Romans (or the Greeks, or the Babylonians, or the Assyrians) to leave you alone, it is difficult to make the shift to understanding that the liberation being offered is of a cosmic nature and on a cosmic scale. The people who met Jesus had a model in their minds of what it meant to be the Messiah. Having been found by Jesus, they did not know what they had found.

We, too, have models of what Jesus is supposed to be and supposed to be for us. When we meet Jesus, do we make the same mistake as the first disciples? Do we correctly say, “We have found the Messiah!” but have some idea in our heads that we expect Jesus to live up to? When we “come and see,” do we see only what we expect to see? Do we see what the Lord really is, and really wants for our lives, and then reject it because it does not match our preexisting model? Or do we see clearly and honestly, accepting what we see even if it means changing our minds? Call is about finding and following, not finding and leading. And we have to be willing to “come and see.”

There are small clues in this story about how the Christ behaves when we first meet him. With both Simon and Nathanael, he did the same thing: He identified who they were, and then he identified how they would be changed. To Simon he says, “You are Simon, son of John. You will

be called Cephas (Peter).” To Nathanael he says, “Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile [no deceit; nothing false].” And then he says, “You shall see greater things than that. You shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Clarifying our identity is one of the likely reasons we seek the Christ and is one of the gifts the Christ has to give us. Who am I and what is important in my life right now? Where am I headed; who am I becoming? It is tempting to think that these are good questions for the young (and they are); but for those of us who are now counting our ages by portions of a century, they are good questions for us, too. Always remember that regeneration takes a lifetime. Always remember that if we are not learning we might as well be dead. We never master the art of living. Even Arthur Rubinstein, one of the world’s greatest pianists, practiced every day. He did his scales just as a beginning student does. Even when we know our identity and direction, we keep following the divine’s lead. When we come across a force that helps us clarify our identity and direction, chances are we are in the presence of the Christ.

*When we meet Jesus,
do we make the same
mistake as the first
disciples?*

Another clue this story gives us about meeting the true Christ is that we might say something outrageous! When Nathanael understands that Jesus is not your average guy (in that odd little story about seeing him under the fig tree), he blurts out a trinity of titles for Jesus, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!” What an odd thing to say at a first meeting. John the Baptist tells Andrew and someone else, “Look, the Lamb of God!” They follow after him. But when Jesus asks, “What do you want?” what silly thing to they say? “Where are you staying?” Is that the first question on your list of things to ask your Savior?

And there is that question, “What do you want?” So often I beg Jesus to give me a sign, to tell me what to do, to make up my mind for me about something. And so often the “answer” I get back is, “What do you want?”

Jesus is finding ordinary people on an ordinary day. You don’t have to be at the spiritual retreat center, you don’t have to be on especially good behavior, you don’t have to be articulate. The true Christ is the one who finds ordinary people in their ordinary lives.

A harder clue to discern is the promise Jesus makes at the end of this passage: “You will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” It might be difficult to tell whether angels are ascending and descending or if you have indigestion. But one thing is important about this statement, which is an echo of the first statement in this call story: pointing. John

the Baptist points at Jesus and says, “Look, the Lamb of God.” Jesus points at heaven and says, “Look, it is open.” A real teacher always points to the lesson, not to him- or herself. The true Christ points to the lessons playing out in your life that will bring you to heaven.

Lastly, and importantly, discovering the Messiah makes us want to tell our friends. When we have good news, we want to share it. When we have something wonderful, we want to include our friends. Have you ever had something so wonderful happen to you that you just had to pick up the phone or knock on someone’s door and tell them about it? Meeting the true Christ makes us bubble over with the enthusiasm of bringing other people into the experience. Watch inside yourself for the urge to tell about your spiritual encounters—and let yourself do it. The present Christ is a gift to us, and gifts need to move, to continue to be given—don’t hold back!

Call is about finding and following. When we find Christ by letting Christ find us, the next step is to follow. Following leads to changes. Following is forever. Following is not always perfect. We may not always understand what Christ asks of us and we may not always believe we are capable of what the Messiah asks of us. To illustrate this, I’d like to quote from an article from Jerry Goebel. He writes:

“Philip is one of my role models. I would liken him to an unsung hero of confused followers. . . . I like Philip because he shows us the raw core of a believer. He starts so strong in his faith. Jesus seeks him out (as he seeks us) and says, “Follow me!” Without hesitation, Philip follows the Lord. His first action as a believer is to run out and find Nathanael, a close friend who is also searching but lost. “Come and see,” Philip tells him, then brings him directly to Jesus. Then Philip fumbles and trips as he tries to decide where to place Jesus in his life: “He is a good man, but is he truly the Messiah?” Philip is moved by compassion for the hungry masses, but relies on his own abilities to meet their need. He is given a chance to bring the lost (gentiles) to Jesus, but is tripped up by his religious prejudice and parochialism. Yet finally, when his heart acknowledges Jesus’ claims, he gives himself totally to the Lord and his ‘purposes.’ He takes the initiative to go and seek out gentiles in Phrygia. In the strength of the Holy Spirit, Philip learns to rely on the ‘Master’s Card’ and not his own resources. He rushes decidedly to Phrygia, to the people he once turned away from in his original confusion and uncertainty. What a story of God’s grace and provision! His sojourn is so like ours. Let’s reexamine the critical steps of this faith journey:

1. Enthusiasm at the start;
2. Confusion when it comes down to really making Jesus the Lord of his life;

3. Failure in attempts to do God’s work with his own resources;

4. Hesitation when he is called to reach beyond his own comfort zone;

5. But finally, total and unmitigated reliance upon Jesus.

“For the many of us who trip before step five, Philip shows us there is hope. Don’t stop! The journey is hard—but when the Lord asks us to feed the thousands he is not asking us to draw on our limited resources—instead, he offers his own endless assurances. Blessed be God!”

Call is about finding and following. We are all called. Jesus is looking for you, saying “Come and see,” saying “Follow me,” at every moment in each of our lives. Can you see him? Can you hear him call your name? Are you willing to follow despite your feet of clay, despite your misunderstandings, despite your prejudices? Are you willing to be found—every day—and to be told who you really are? Come and see!

Amen.



The sanctuary of the Elmwood New Church in MA

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 6

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, 'If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.'

Exodus 13:17

Evil of life is attended with its own falsity, which falsity lies hidden in the man who is in evil of life, and sometimes he is not aware that it is in him; but as soon as he thinks about the truths of the church, and especially when he thinks about salvation, then this falsity comes forth and clearly shows itself.

Arcana Coelestia #8094

Tuesday, September 7

So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.

Exodus 13:18

And God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness. That this signifies that under the Divine auspices they were brought to confirm the truths and goods of faith through temptations.

Arcana Coelestia #8098

Wednesday, September 8

And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, 'God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here.'

Exodus 13:19

As "burial" signified resurrection in general, and every resurrection, therefore the ancients were very solicitous about their burials and the places where they should be buried; as Abraham, that he should be buried in Hebron in the land of Canaan; also Isaac and Jacob, with their wives . . .

Arcana Coelestia #2916.5

Thursday, September 9

They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.

Exodus 13:20

And they journeyed from Succoth, and encamped in Etham. That this signifies the second state after they were liberated, is evident from the fact that the journeyings and encampments of the sons of Israel after they went forth from Egypt, signify the spiritual states of those who were liberated by the Lord (concerning whom see above). The changes of states are signified by the journeys from one place to another and the residing there; the second state is here signified by the journeying from Succoth to Etham, because the first state was signified by the journeying from Rameses to Succoth.

Arcana Coelestia #8103

Friday, September 10

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.

Exodus 13:21

If the internal sense of the Word, or truth Divine in its glory, were to appear before a man who is not regenerated, it would be like thick darkness, in which he would see nothing at all, and by which he would also be blinded, that is, would believe nothing. From all this it can be seen what is signified by a "cloud by day."

Arcana Coelestia #8106.3

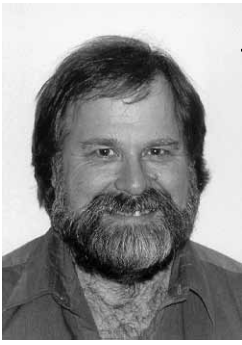
Saturday, September 11

Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Exodus 13:22

The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people. This signifies that the presence of the Lord was perpetual.

Arcana Coelestia #8110



Walk in the Light

Rev. Ken Turley

The Rev. Ken Turley is the president of the Swedenborgian Church. He previously served as pastor of the Fryeburg New Church in Maine.

Genesis 17:1-2

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.”

John 11:7-10

Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.”

Spiritual Diaries 5646

When people walk, it is indeed with the body, but it is actually from the will; and the person’s walking is in proportion to the amount of will there is present . . .

Heaven and Hell 534.3

The thoughts of a person that proceed from their intention or will are represented in the other life by ways; and ways are visibly presented there in exact accord with those thoughts of intention; and in accord with the thoughts that proceed from intention every one walks. For this reason, the character of spirits and their thoughts are known from their ways

I’ve noticed a lot of people walking lately. It is a great way to stay healthy. I enjoy walking, and try to get out for a good walk myself on a regular basis. In fact, walking, when it is done right, is supposed to be the safest and at the same time most beneficial form of exercise there is. It is good for the body and good for the soul. It exercises both arms and legs and keeps the shoulders and hips loose, it gives a gentle but steady twisting motion to the spine and helps keep the back straight and at the same time loose, and

it also exercises the heart and the lungs—what is called a “cardiovascular workout.”

Perhaps that is why walking is such an effective metaphor for life—why, in Swedenborg’s writings, walking corresponds to living, why he says that the thoughts and feelings and intentions of a person are expressed in the way they walk. Every part of the person is in motion. If the angels can know everything about a person from the gesture of one hand, it is not surprising, then, that walking can reveal so much about a person’s inner state. In *Secrets of Heaven* 518-9, Swedenborg says that “to walk” is equivalent to “to live,” regarding “the way.” In fact, there is an entire Eastern religion based on the idea of “the way,” called the Tao.

But let’s think for a minute about walking as a metaphor for life. It is an unconscious way of expressing our spiritual attitude and can be a conscious way of expressing our approach to life. We can stand tall and walk loose and easy, living up to our full personhood with calm and humor; cover a lot of ground; and enjoy the trip, finding it healthful and pleasant. Alternatively, we can hunch over and take small, timid steps, limiting ourselves out of fear. This second option is a very stressful way to move through life—it’s not productive, and it’s also not attractive.

We can also walk while looking down, which may mean we’re thoughtful and introspective—a helpful posture when we’re moving through unstable or dangerous footing and need to choose our direction carefully, or when we’re studying the path of those who have gone before. But a person walking with head bent to the ground is most often depressed and unhappy. Doing so seriously limits our perspective, making us miss the big picture, only seeing our own immediate concerns. We miss opportunities that present themselves and then are gone, miss out on the beauty and variety of life around us.

When you walk in the world, you encounter and experience all kinds of things. You can bring home all kinds of treasures, but there are also times when you pick up ideas or feelings that are best not kept and carried around. Yesterday, a few of us went for a walk in the woods. We saw some beautiful trees and many tracks of deer, and we flushed a family of grouse. And my brother-in-law picked a bunch of bayberry leaves and brought home some pretty rocks. But we also brought home a bunch of ticks. Sometimes moving through life we experience and can bring home to keep and use important information,

beautiful thoughts, and useful experiences. But sometimes we come home carrying negative thoughts and feelings that drain us of our energy, and that, left to burrow into our psyche, can affect our entire system and even make us very sick. We must pick and choose what to retain and what to get rid of. This is especially important when it comes to the thoughts and feelings we pick up as we make our way through the world. Those unpleasant thoughts and annoying experiences are just like ticks, and just as we check ourselves over to get rid of those unpleasant ticks that are clinging to us, we need to regularly check over our thoughts and feelings and see if we are carrying unkind thoughts or angry feelings that we somehow picked up along the way. We need to remove them from our psyche the way we would remove a tick.

We learned something else on our walk yesterday. There are dangers in the world, things best left alone, places where we shouldn't go sticking our noses. Thankfully, most of us learn to control our impulses, unlike most dogs—ome rustling bushes, a small furry creature scurrying along, and my brother in law's dog could not help but pounce. And sure enough, she came away with a nose full of porcupine quills. We don't have to worry about porcupines so much, but we do have to worry about those impulses that would lead us to respond in kind to someone who is rude or offensive. So often those kinds of situations are far more trouble than they are worth. With some awareness and wisdom we can learn to avoid and just not engage.

And finally, when we walk, we need to consider the most important aspect of all: How do we see to get around? Recall our New Testament scripture: Those who walk in the dark will stumble, but those who walk in the light will not stumble. Swedenborg tells us that walking in the light denotes living in truth, while walking in the dark means living in falsity. Living in the truth means knowing and understanding God's teaching, knowing and understanding what is of value to God, knowing and understanding the qualities of heavenly life, and "walking" in those ways—in other words, living in a way that both establishes inwardly and expresses outwardly those teachings, values, and qualities.

Walking in the dark is hard on a person. We are constantly stumbling on things we do not see. It can be painful, and it can leave us walking around in circles without making any progress in spite of all the effort we put out. But when we walk in the light, we can see and comprehend what is around us. We can avoid dangers and even use what might be obstacles to our benefit. In the light we have a sense not only of what is around us—our own immediate concerns—but also of what is ahead of us. We can establish long-range goals as well.

The light of God, which makes life so much safer, so much more beautiful, is not something that we find by going

someplace else. It is more a matter of turning that light on inside of us. It can be learned by reading the Bible and the Word of God, it can be learned by reading Swedenborg and any number of other books about the human condition, but it can also be discovered in the warmth and light of God's love, in that fire we kindle in our own hearts and minds. It is the warmth of that love and the light of that wisdom that makes our walk through life an enjoyable experience. It is what keeps us safe and healthy and on the right path. And it is what makes us enjoyable and useful companions for others who are walking that same path. Amen.

Swedenborg on Light

There are two forms of light that give light to man, the light of the world and the light of heaven. The light of the world comes from the sun, the light of heaven from the Lord. The light of the world is intended for the natural or external man, and so for things that exist within the natural man. Although these things do not appear to belong to that light, nevertheless they do, for the natural man is not able to grasp anything except by means of such things as occur and are visible in the world of the natural sun, thus unless they are given some visible form by the light and the shade of that world. All concepts of time and concepts of space, which in the natural man play so great a role that without them he is incapable of thought, belong also to the light of the world. The light of heaven however is intended for the spiritual or internal man. Man's interior mind, where his intellectual concepts reside that are called immaterial, belongs in that light. Of this no one is immediately conscious even though he refers to his intellect as sight and attributes light to it. The reason why he is not immediately conscious of it is that as long as he is engrossed in worldly and bodily interests his perception is solely of such things as belong to the light of the world and not of such as belong to the light of heaven. The light of heaven comes from the Lord alone, and the whole of heaven is bathed in that light.

Arcana Coelestia #3223

Monday, September 13

Then the Lord said to Moses: "Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea." *Exodus 14:1&2*

Temptations with man are spiritual combats between evil and good spirits, which combats are from those things and concerning those things which the man has done and thought, and which are in his memory. The evil spirits accuse and attack; but the good excuse and defend. *Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 8131*

Tuesday, September 14

Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.' I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so. *Exodus 14:3&4*

Persuasive faith exists together with evil of life, but not saving faith; for persuasive faith is a persuasion that all things that belong to the doctrine of the church are true, not for the sake of truth, nor for the sake of life, nor even for the sake of salvation, for in this they scarcely believe; but for the sake of self-advantage, that is, for the sake of getting honors and wealth, and for the sake of reputation with a view to these. *Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 8148:2*

Wednesday, September 15

The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly. The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. *Exodus 14:8&9*

The signification of "encamping" is the setting in order of truth and good by the Lord for the undergoing of temptations. *Arcana Coelestia #8155*

Thursday, September 16

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground." *Exodus 14:15&16*

They who are in temptations are wont to slack their hands and betake themselves solely to prayers, which they then ardently pour forth, not knowing that prayers will not avail, but that they must fight against the falsities and evils which are being injected by the hells. This fight is performed by means of the truths of faith, which help because they confirm goods and truths against falsities and evils. *Arcana Coelestia #8179*

Friday, September 17

"Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers." *Exodus 14:17&18*

When it is said in the Word that "Jehovah hardens the heart" and also "leads into evil," in the internal sense, where the truth itself is in its nakedness, it is meant that they who are in falsity and in evil harden their own heart and lead themselves into evil. *Arcana Coelestia #8186*

Saturday, September 18

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. *Exodus 14:19&20*

As regards influx into the will and into the understanding of man, be it known that the Lord takes the utmost care lest the infernals flow into a man's will; for if they were to flow into his will after he had been regenerated or made a church, it would be all over with him, because his will is nothing but evil. *Arcana Coelestia #8194*



The Rev. Sarah Buteux was ordained as a Swedenborgian minister in 2001. She is currently serving as pastor of the First Congregational Church of Hadley (United Church of Christ).

Luke 19:28-47

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God." Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers." Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him.

Although I may be jumping the gun here a bit, I'd like to begin this morning with a story of resurrection. It's the story of our sister church over the river and up the hill in Haydenville, a church that was right on the edge of closing about five years ago, when my friend and colleague Rev. Dr. Andrea Avayzian accepted a call to be their pastor.

Things were not looking good for the Haydenville Congregational Church when Andrea got there. There were only fifteen active members left, twelve of whom were over the age of seventy. The front steps were crumbling, the ceiling of the sanctuary was peeling, and the real estate agents were hovering. When Andrea drove up to the church for the first time she found caution tape plastered all over the front door. How's that for a sign?

And yet, although she could have had her pick of any number of growing, thriving, financially stable churches, Andrea felt called to begin a good work there. She took the job, gathered her little band of parishioners together, and said, "First things first, we're going to start a newsletter, put a calendar in it, and send it out to everybody we know."

"But, honey," said an elderly woman named Cora, "we don't need a newsletter. There are only fifteen of us, we're all related, and we talk to each other every day. We already know what's going on."

"Right," said Andrea, "but we're going to act as if there are people out there who aren't related to you who might want to come be part of our community. Other people who also might want to know what's going on."

Well, Cora thought that was a little silly, but she and the others went along.

Then, a little while later, Andrea said, "We're going to repaint the sanctuary so we can go back in there for worship." Because, you see, they'd been worshipping in the church parlor for years.

"But, Andrea," someone said, "we can't afford to paint the sanctuary."

"We can't afford to heat it either," said another.

"And besides," said a third, "it's so sad to go in there for worship, because we barely fill out the first two pews."

"Well," said Andrea, "We're going to act as if the money to paint and heat the sanctuary will come, and then we're going to worship in there and act as if other people will want to come and sit with us. That way, when they do show up, we'll have room for them and they'll feel welcome."

"And speaking of welcome," said Andrea, "we're going to start hosting coffee hour again every Sunday after

church, and we're going to have to put out more than one little pot of coffee and fifteen doughnuts when we do.

"But Andrea," they said, "we can't afford that either, and besides, only a few of us drink coffee. Also, please try to remember, dear, that we don't need to talk here after church because we're all related and we already talk to each other every day anyway."

"Yes, I know," said Andrea, "but we're going to act as if more people will come, people we're not related to, and when they do they'll want to fellowship with us and get to know us. So let's all go home and find some coffee and some stuff in our pantries to bring next Sunday so we have something to offer visitors."

Well, in spite of the fact that they thought Andrea was slightly delusional about all these people who might come, the congregation went along with her crazy plans. Andrea called in some favors from friends, and soon the sanctuary was painted. Bit by bit the congregation found enough money to heat it, and soon people did start to show up.

The congregation replaced the front steps, removed the caution tape, and soon learned to live as if even more good things were going to happen well before they actually did. They put in a handicapped bathroom, even though they didn't yet have anyone who needed it. They ordered more hymnals, even though they already had enough for the people on hand.

And then, before they knew it, it was almost time for Christmas. Andrea gathered her little flock again and told them that it was time to order candles for the Christmas Eve Service. "Oh, no need for that dear. We already have candles," they told her. And one little old lady brought out a shoe box with twenty stubby little candles in it that they'd been using and reusing for goodness knows how many years.

"We used to stand in a big circle around the sanctuary and sing 'Silent Night' as we lit the candles," she sighed, "but now we gather up by the altar. It doesn't take that long, so these should still be big enough."

"No," said Andrea softly, as she gently took hold of the box. "We're going to order a hundred new candles for Christmas Eve. We're going to act as if we'll have enough people here to circle the whole sanctuary."

And a few weeks later, as the organist played "Silent Night," there were indeed enough people and enough candles present for the whole congregation to ring the sanctuary shoulder-to-shoulder.

And everyone sang—everyone, that is, but the original fifteen saints who had called Andrea to be their pastor just a few months ago. They wanted to and they would have, but they found it was simply too hard to sing through their tears.

I have to say, I give those people up in Haydenville a lot of credit. When my colleagues and I talk about the resurrection of the Haydenville church, most of us point to Andrea's tremendous vitality, charisma, and pastoral gifts as the primary catalyst for that church's dramatic transformation. And those of us who do are absolutely right.

But I give the fifteen people who called her and were brave enough to follow her a whole lot of credit as well, and I know Andrea would agree, because it is not easy to live "as if" in a world that is decidedly not. It is not easy to see beyond what is to what could be. Some people are better at it than others, but for most of us it's really hard, especially in the church, to see past our present reality and envision something new. It's much easier to just settle in and accept that this is how it is and hope it doesn't get worse.

And if it's that hard to envision a new reality within the relatively safe confines of the church, how much harder is it to do so out in the not-so-safe confines of the world? I mean, it's one thing to risk spending money on little things like new hymnals or a few cans of paint. It's a whole other thing to risk spending money on big things like universal healthcare, public education, or foreign aid. It's one thing to risk welcoming strange new people to your church. It's a whole other thing to risk your own person or the safety and security of your family or even your country for strange people around the world.

And yet, from the very beginning of his ministry, this is what Jesus called those around him to do. Three short years before he was nailed to a cross, Jesus stood up in his hometown synagogue and read from the scroll of Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he said, "because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

And in a sense, on a small scale, this is precisely what Jesus did. He did bless the poor and heal the sick. He freed specific men and woman from demons and madness, the horrors of leprosy and the stigma of illness and uncleanness. And in terms of proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, he talked about the kingdom of God a lot.

It's one thing to risk welcoming strange new people to your church. It's a whole other thing to risk your own person.

But on a deeper level, what Jesus truly sought to do was free all people from the way they saw the world. He sought to cure our communal blindness, to free us all from the oppressive cycles of fear and greed and violence we have come to accept as normal. Invoking the visions of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus spoke of a time when the wolf and the lamb would feed each other and the lion would lie down with the ox, only he was talking about a world where we would no longer exploit one another to survive.

He spoke of a place where people would one day give freely rather than lend at interest, share all God's resources rather than claim them as their own; a world where debts would be forgiven, bread would be broken and shared, and we would know war no more because we would recognize our enemies as neighbors, the stranger in our midst as a child of God.

Jesus came to show us another way, but the catch is that in order for that way to become a reality you have to live it into being. Like the people of Haydenville, you have to act "as if" that future of peace, love, and understanding has already come.

You need to be willing to give first, turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, give not only your coat but your shirt as well. But down that road, well before you reach the kingdom, more often than not lies trouble. The sad truth is that it ain't easy to turn the other cheek in a slap-happy world. The reality is that you often have to give a lot more and walk a lot farther than you really want.

Which is why, more often than not, we wait. We hang back. For far too many people, back in Jesus' day and even now, there has always been this sense that once the kingdom of God comes, then we can all live happily ever after, but until that day we have to make do with what is and be realistic. So we content ourselves by resolving that we'll beat our swords into ploughshares right after everyone else beats their swords into ploughshares first. We'll alleviate the suffering of poor once they are in a position to use the money well. We'll put down our guns once all the criminals are put away. We'll cancel Third World debt after developing countries put an end to corruption inside their governments. We'll protect the environment when it's either economically advantageous to do so or too late to do anything else.

For far too many of us there is a long list of things that will have to happen first on earth before we can realistically live as Jesus lived, but until then, living that way would simply be foolish in the extreme.

And yet that is what Jesus calls us to do, not just with his words but with his very life. As Jesus rides into Jerusalem

on Palm Sunday, year after year, we watch him with awe and fear, with admiration and dread anticipation, because we know what awaits him there and we are loathe to follow.

We know how risky it is to live as if the kingdom has already come long before it actually has. We know what his enemies will do to him. We know just how far he will have to walk and how much he will have to give before it is all over. We know what the wolves will do to this lamb who has come to lie down with them, because we see the consequences writ large as they nail him down and lift him high upon the cross.

And yet he rides on anyway and invites us to do the same. When I look at Jesus on his little donkey riding into Jerusalem, I see a man who was not afraid to live as if the kingdom of God had already come. I see a man who was not afraid to pay the price to see that vision become a reality, a man who took a chance, who took the hit, who suffered and died for something few could see or even imagine. And if that were the end of his story, I'd still love him and weep for him, but I'd warn you all away.

Thankfully, you and I know it's not the end, of his story or ours. And because we know this, we know that, as crazy as it may seem, living "as if" is the only way to find the truth and the life that Christ offers. We know all about Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and Holy Saturday, but we also know a little something about the promise of Easter Sunday.

And so I pray that God would grant us the grace and the courage to live into that promise, to act as if his kingdom has come and trust that as hard and as lonely as the road may be, the way littered with palms and shadowed by the cross is the way you and I must learn to follow.

Prayer

Dearest Lord Jesus, you have chosen a path for yourself that is hard for us to follow. You ask of us that which is hard to give. Lord, on this day, as we lay down our palms before you, grant us the courage and the grace we need to lay down our lives, that we might take up our cross and follow you. Amen.

We know how risky it is to live as if the kingdom has already come long before it actually has.

Monday, September 20

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

Exodus 16:2

They who have not been instructed about man's regeneration suppose that a man can be regenerated without temptation; and some that he has been regenerated when he has undergone one temptation.

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 8403

Tuesday, September 21

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." *Exodus 16:3*

For very many kinds of evil have made the delight of his former life, that is, have made his old life; and it is impossible for all these evils to be suddenly and simultaneously mastered, because they cling to the man very firmly, having been rooted in parents from time immemorial, and consequently are innate in him, besides having been confirmed in him from his infancy through his own actual evils.

Arcana Coelestia #8403.3

Wednesday, September 22

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not." *Exodus 16:4*

It is called "hidden manna," because the delight of heavenly love, which those receive who are conjoined to the Lord through love, is wholly unknown to those that are in a love not heavenly; and this delight no one is able to receive except he that acknowledges the Lord's Divine Human; for from this the delight proceeds. *Apocalypse Explained #146*

Thursday, September 23

And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord." *Exodus 16:8*

For in the other life the state of morning is when spiritual good, or the good of the internal man, is in clearness; and natural good, or the good of the external man, is in obscurity: but the state of evening is when natural good, or the good of the external man, is in clearness and spiritual good, or the good of the internal man, is in obscurity. *Arcana Coelestia #8431*

Friday, September 24

The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" *Exodus 16:12*

By "flesh" is signified that which is man's own, or what is the same, the evil of his will, is evident from Moses where the subject treated of is the desire of the Israelitish people to eat flesh. *Arcana Coelestia #10283.11*

Saturday, September 25

This is what the Lord has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents." *Exodus 16:16*

The subject here treated of is the good of those who are of the Lord's spiritual kingdom, which good is signified by "the manna," and that sufficient of this will be given for everyone and sufficient for the society; for each house of the sons of Israel represented one society in heaven. *Arcana Coelestia #8469*

SEP 26 No Shortcuts

Rev. Dr. George F. Dole



Rev. Dr. Dole is the pastor of the Swedenborgian church in Bath, Maine. He is also a faculty member at The Swedenborgian House of Studies in Berkeley, CA.

Genesis 12:1-9

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Revelation 21:9-27

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four

cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass. I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Secrets of Heaven 4063

When someone is becoming a new person . . . (that is, being reborn), it does not happen instantly, as some people believe, but over many years—in fact, through our whole life, right up to the last. . . .

It is common knowledge that we have one state in infancy, another in childhood, another in adolescence, another in maturity, and another in old age. It is also recognized that we shed our state of infancy and its games when we make the passage into the state of childhood and that we shed the state of childhood when we make the passage into the state of adolescence, shed this, in turn, when we make the passage into the state of maturity, and shed this again when we make the passage into the state of old age. And if we reflect, we can also recognize that each age has its delights and that, through these, in sequence, we are led to those appropriate to the next age—that these delights serve to bring us through from one stage to another, eventually to the delight in intelligence and wisdom appropriate to old age.

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and the Lamb is its lamp. (Revelation 21:23)

Most novels are written with an effort to engage and sustain readers' interest from beginning to end. Skillful novelists have a good sense of pace as well as a good sense of what needs to be left unsaid in order to keep curiosity alive. They want us to identify with their characters, to follow their fortunes, and to be eager to find out what happens to them in the end. This means that the story will raise questions and leave the answers for later. Novelists definitely do not want people to pick up their books and read a page here and there in no particular sequence.

The Bible is, basically, a story. It is a story that has laws and songs and genealogies in it, true, but all of these are embedded in the framework of a story. It is a unique story in that it is the story of a community that covers centuries, so that the individual characters in the opening chapters are long gone by the time we reach the end—gone, but not forgotten. If we do sit down to read it from cover to cover, it is so long that it is easy to lose track of the main thread, though, especially when we find ourselves reading page after page of rules for animal sacrifice, say, or psalm after psalm after psalm.

It can help, then, to step back from all this detail and look at the whole from a distance, so to speak; and that is the point of our two texts. The first, the promise to Abram, is a promise of a world at peace—"in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." The second is the picture of a heavenly city that is filled with the beauty of the Lord. It is a long, long way from the first to the second, from the promise to the fulfillment.

It is a long way, and on a long trip it can be very easy to get so caught up in an immediate situation that we lose sight of the ultimate goal. We make shortsighted decisions that sooner or later come back to haunt us, as all too many people are discovering these days when their credit card debt drives them into bankruptcy. I'm fond of a story Bob Kirven told. His father was visiting him when the Theological School was in Newton, and they were driving through a typically upscale Newton residential district. Bob remarked that he wished he could afford a house like one of those, and his father said, "So do most of the people who live in them."

Let's suppose, then, that Abram was a basically sincere but shortsighted man. The proof of his sincerity is that he heard the Lord's message, because the Lord is sending the same message to everyone all the time. The proof of his shortsightedness is that he heard it not as a call to the holy city but as a call to worldly greatness. If he had heard it as a call to angelic unselfishness, it would have had no appeal, no credibility. Greatness was something he could understand, something he saw as worth sacrificing for.

Abram's reasons for following the Lord's instructions were not the best of reasons, then, but they were his own reasons, and the really important thing is that they were strong enough to prompt him to obey. To use an image, it may not have aimed him straight at the Holy City, but it altered his course a little bit in the right general direction. We take quite for granted the practice of offering people incentives for doing things that they do not find intrinsically rewarding: "Finish your carrots and you can have dessert." The goal in this case is good health, but sometimes that does not have much motivational clout.

*Deep down inside,
what we actually long
for is heaven, but in
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the surface.*

Adults are not all that different in this regard. We are often caught up in trying to deal with immediate situations. When circumstances raise questions, we want the answers. We do not want to leave them for later, certainly not for the end of our earthly story. Divine providence is different. "Divine providence," we are told, "focuses on eternal matters, and focuses on temporal matters only as they coincide with eternal ones" (*Divine Providence* 214). The Lord always has the Holy City in mind. If getting a new car happens to be a step toward the Holy City, then the Lord will do whatever can be done to make that possible. We may or may not cooperate with that providence, which is the main reason the story takes so long to get from Abram to the New Jerusalem.

It happens time and again. Not too long ago I read an article about people who had had great strokes of good or ill fortune. Some were lottery winners, and some were people who had experienced a devastating loss. The immediate effects might be striking, but the long-term effects were far less so. Basically constructive and contented individuals continued to be basically constructive and contented. Discontented people continued to be discontented. We reach for what we think will bring us happiness, we try to avoid what we think will bring us unhappiness, and we are slow to learn that, essentially, happiness comes from within and not from without.

Happiness comes from within, but it comes into our consciousness as we relate to each other. Somehow or other, the Lord has to bend our desires for greatness so that they become desires for goodness. Deep down inside,

what we actually long for is heaven, but in the shallowness of our perceptions we keep reaching for things that look heavenly on the surface.

When we read the Bible as a parable of our own spiritual journeys, then, we should be sobered by the amount of violence and injustice we find there. Sometimes the very best we can do is not very good at all; but in a strange way, that does not really matter, not forever. What matters most is not how good it is but whether it is better than the actual alternatives. For some people, an outburst of profanity may represent a massive effort at self-control, venting anger in words instead of resorting to physical violence. For others, the same kind of outburst may represent a complete loss of self-control. We see what others do; we do not see what they choose not to do.

This makes it hard to know for sure whether someone is turning toward heaven or toward hell. I suspect that all of us feel fairly certain about some of the people we have known for years and years, because the outward signs of heavenly character do become clearer with the passage of time; and every once in a while we meet someone who seems transparently decent—or, on the other hand, someone who disquiets us for reasons that we cannot quite fathom. Often, though, we judge others on the basis of immediate decisions without any real understanding of their long-term context. This is rather like opening a novel in the middle, reading a few pages, and deciding who is right and who is wrong.

It is remarkable how obvious this tendency can be at resurrection services. When someone close to us dies, all the little everyday distractions are gone and we find ourselves suddenly aware of what these “little things” meant to us. We are faced not with a need for a medication or the need for transportation but with a whole life, and time after time there is a quality, a meaning to that whole life that is somehow embodied in all the little things. When our children were told of Grandpa Dole’s death, one of them immediately reacted by remembering Grandpa’s binoculars—undoubtedly recalling some special moment when Grandpa had shared them. It would not be too much to say that the binoculars had “spiritual meaning” for the child.

There is spiritual meaning to preparing meal after meal, to going to work day after day, spiritual meaning to arguments and reconciliations, to illnesses and vacations, to purchases and sales, and that spiritual meaning can be found in the answer to a very simple question: “Is this a step toward heaven?” The basic importance of everything our church teaches about heaven is not that it tells us about

some future reward but that it tells us what to look for here and now.

In heaven, for example, our true feelings and thoughts are right there on the surface for everyone to see, and we are supremely sensitive to each other’s joys and sorrows. Sorrow in heaven? There is a story in *Marriage Love* (§533) about some angels who were given permission to “look down into the world. They did so, and all they could see there was darkness. . . . they were saddened.” And the Lord wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

Sometimes we are more sensitive to each other than at other times, and we are more open about our deeper feelings with some people than with others, but we are far from the kind of total transparency and constant sensitivity that make heaven what it is. We lose sight of these goals when we are tending to preparing meal after meal, to going to work day after day, to arguments and reconciliations, to illnesses and vacations, to purchases and sales; and this is a clear indication that we do indeed have a long way to go.

In heaven, for example, our true feelings and thoughts are right there on the surface for everyone to see.

There may be a great many detours on that long way, but there are no shortcuts and no giant steps. We need all the little occasions for the simple reason that they break this formidable journey down into little steps that we can take. Every time we catch a glimpse of the goal, we find our course being corrected a little. Sometimes obstacles crop up and deflect us, sometimes unexpected doors open and invite us—and always, always, the Lord has the ultimate goal in mind. In the perfect love and wisdom of divine providence, it does not matter how far we are from that goal. All that matters is whether we are moving toward it or away from it. In the Book of Revelation, the church at Laodicea is sent the harshest message, the one about being lukewarm and on the verge of being totally cast out. That is the church that is given the most extraordinary promise: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To anyone who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:20-21).

From Abram to the New Jerusalem is a long way; and perhaps one of the most heartening messages of the Bible is that even in the worst of times that it portrays, the Lord is finding a way to guide a stubborn little community a bit closer to that radiant goal. Amen.

Monday, September 27

The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. *Exodus 16:17*

Gather ye of it every man according to the mouth of his eating. That this signifies reception and appropriation according to the capacity of each one, is evident from the signification of "gathering," when said of the good of truth that is signified by "the manna," as being to receive; and from the signification of "each one according to the mouth of his eating," as being appropriation according to the capacity of each one. *Arcana Coelestia # 8467*

Tuesday, September 28

And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. *Exodus 16:19&20*

Good arises from a contrary origin, when it does so from man, and not from the Lord; for the Lord is good itself, consequently He is the source of all good.

Arcana Coelestia #8480

Wednesday, September 29

"Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning." *Exodus 16:23*

A Sabbath holy to Jehovah is the morrow. That this signifies the conjunction of good and truth to eternity, is evident from the signification of "the Sabbath" as being the conjunction of good and truth (of which below); and from the signification of "the morrow," as being to eternity (see n. 3998). *Arcana Coelestia #8495*

Thursday, September 30

So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field." *Exodus 16:24&25*

Before regeneration man acts from obedience; but after regeneration from affection. These two states are inverse to each other; for in the former state truth rules, but in the latter good rules; or, in the former state man looks downward or backward, but in the latter upward or forward. *Arcana Coelestia #8505:2*

Friday, October 1

"For six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none."

Exodus 16:26

In this state man is let into temptations, which are combats with the evils and falsities in him; and then the Lord fights for the man and also with him. But after this state there is a state of the conjunction of good and truth, thus at that time a state of rest for the Lord also.

Arcana Coelestia #8506

Saturday, October 2

The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. *Exodus 16:31*

The good of truth which is with those who are of the spiritual kingdom is implanted in the intellectual part, for there is formed by the Lord in this part a new will, which is that the man wills to do according to the truth that he has drawn from the teaching of his church; and when he wills and does this truth, it becomes with him good, and is called "spiritual good," and also "the good of truth." . . . [T]his is really truth, he indeed believes, because he has faith from the teaching; but he has no perception whether it is true, unless he may seem to himself to have it from the fact that he has confirmed it with himself. *Arcana Coelestia #8521:2*

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The Swedenborgian Church bases its teachings on the Bible as illuminated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and theologian. Swedenborg envisioned a new Christianity coming into being that was revitalized by the Spirit of the Lord.

We believe that there is one God, known by many names. We worship Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God, who made himself known to us through his life as the divine human Jesus of Nazareth, and whom we continue to know through his Holy Spirit, which operates through and around us.

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and that in its pages we find two parallel stories: the account of people, places, and events; and within that account a spiritual reflection of our individual and corporate journeys. The Bible, with its infinite depth of meaning, is truly a living Word, guiding us as we strive to make ourselves temples for the Lord by loving and serving others. We believe that, above all, "all religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord's presence and leading, and to facilitate their spiritual well-being. We invite you to participate with others who are seeking to deepen their inner life and pursue their spiritual journey.

Heaven and Hell #176. People [in heaven] who are focused on intelligence stroll there picking the flowers and weaving garlands to grace babies with. There are kinds of tree and flower there never seen, not even possible, in our world. In the trees, too, there are fruits in keeping with the quality of the love these intelligent angels are absorbed in. They see such things because a garden and a park, and the fruit trees and flowers, correspond to intelligence and wisdom.

Left: A purple-and-white lupine

Bottom: A peony

Photos by Kevin Baxter



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Our Daily Bread is a ministry of the
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Our Beliefs in Brief:

- God is pure love, pure wisdom, and pure creative power.
- God became human in Jesus Christ and dwells with us.
- The Bible is God's Word, and has many levels of meaning.
- God loves and saves people of all religions.

Invitation

You are invited to use *Our Daily Bread* as a source of inspiration and as a guide for personal meditation and reflection. It is also a resource for home, small group, and church worship. Each issue has a theme, with weekly sermons focusing on various aspects of that theme. Daily meditations provide food for thought throughout the week.

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven, and
do not return to it without
watering the earth and making
it bud and flourish, so that it
yields seed for the sower and
bread for the eater, so is my
word that goes out from my
mouth: It will not return to
me empty, but will accomplish
what I desire, and achieve the
purpose for which I sent it.*

- Isaiah 55:10, 11

**"God gave his
children memory that
they might have roses
in winter."**

-Sir James Barrie

