

MAY/JUNE 2012

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD



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Love & Wisdom

Prayer

By your gracious Spirit,
O God,
Establish us in your love and
heal us with your truth.
Reveal to us what is lacking
within us.
Strengthen us in what is right
and keep us in your service;
Through Christ our Lord.

- *St. Clement of Rome*
(c. AD 96)

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Dear Readers,

Swedenborg uses the terms “love” and “wisdom” countless times in his writings. It is tempting to view love and wisdom, or goodness and truth, as separate entities, independent of and sometimes even in conflict with each other. But nothing could be further from the reality. Like water, love needs a vessel to contain it; love can only be love if it has wisdom to give it shape. Likewise, wisdom is mere form, an empty shell, without love to give it substance. For this reason, love and wisdom are what Swedenborg called “distinguishably one.” While we can separate out the qualities of love and wisdom for the purposes of thought and discussion, they cannot actually be separated in practice.

Not only are love and wisdom functionally inseparable, they are also most fully realized the more entwined they are, one with the other. When love and wisdom “marry” and unite fully, the divine fullness manifests through that marriage. In other words, the more completely we unite these qualities within ourselves and think and act from their union, the more we find ourselves in the flow of the Lord’s providence. This is the ultimate purpose for which we were created: to be vessels for the Lord Jesus Christ’s loving truth.

Our sermons this month talk about love and wisdom’s marriage, its growth, and its reflection in our lives. The cover image depicts the ideographs of love and wisdom as they appear in Japanese Kenji script, a form of calligraphy in which beauty and meaning are, like love and wisdom, interwoven.

Many blessings,
Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

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MAY 6 JESUS, OUR TEACHER

Rev. Ken Turley

Joshua 3:7-17

The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God." Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your

father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Arcana Coelestia 4715

... for one who teaches faith, and not charity, cannot perceive the more interior things of the church. But if he teaches charity, he has good, and this is a dictate to him and guides him . . .

Arcana Coelestia 4844(4)

The doctrinals of faith . . . if separated from those of charity, teach almost nothing. For the doctrinals of charity teach what good is; and the doctrinals of faith teach what truth is; and to teach truth without good is to walk as one who is blind because good is what teaches and leads, and truth is what is taught and led.

[T]he one who teaches divine spiritual goods teaches also divine spiritual truths, for the latter are from the former and are about them.

Arcana Coelestia 4925

Faith without charity, or truth without good, teaches nothing . . .

Sermon

Our subject for this morning is "Jesus, Our Teacher." It seems that every year at about this time the subject of teaching comes up among us. And I expect it is a good thing, for it strikes home with me every time. For you all know I love to hunt, and it follows from what Swedenborg has to say about the corresponding meaning of hunting that I love to teach.

Arcana Coelestia 3309(3): To hunt = to teach, and also to persuade; and this in both senses, from the affection of truth, and from the affection of falsity... Fishers = those who teach from sensuous truths; hunters = those who teach from scientific truths and doctrinals.

Arcana Coelestia 4922(2): 2 Samuel 1:24; To teach the bow = to teach the doctrine of love and charity.

Well, I do have something to teach you this morning—about teaching and learning, and about Jesus—and our spiritual salvation depends upon how well we learn it.

As I said, this subject always shakes me to the core. Swedenborg has a lot to say about how easy it is, as a teacher, to be a hypocrite, and he has some pretty

harsh things to say about those who teach and do not live what they teach. From the number of times he refers to the topic in his writings, we can gather that hypocrisy among teachers is a pretty common thing. The topic was also one of the recurring themes in the teachings of Jesus; he too has some pretty harsh things to say to the religious teachers of his day.

It is a great responsibility to stand up here every Sunday morning, knowing that you all come looking for me to teach you what is right and wrong, good and evil, and how to live your lives so that you can be right with God. If I thought for one moment that that responsibility began and ended with me, it would be too much to stand. I would either succumb to the temptation and become the Jerry Falwell of Fryeburg—or else give it up completely and become a landscaper. What allows me to continue in the position of your minister and keep my head on straight is what we find in *Divine Providence*: “The Word cannot be taught otherwise than mediately, through parents, masters, preachers, books and especially through the reading of it; but still it is not taught by these agencies; but through them by the Lord” (172.6); and also “It is a law of the divine providence that people be led and taught by the Lord from Heaven through the Word, doctrine, and preachings from it; and this in all appearances as of themselves.”

You see, it is only an appearance that I am your teacher. It is only an appearance that you are learning about the Lord by your own intelligence. For the fact is, whatever comes out of my mouth that is good and true is not from me but from the Lord—and whatever you understand of good and truth is not from your own mental abilities but from your willingness to accept the presence of the Lord in your life. At all times, in all things, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our teacher. Anything else is simply an appearance of the truth.

The challenge for me is to surrender my sense of self to the Lord and let divine love and truth flow through my words. The challenge for you in listening to what I have to say is to sort out what is divine love and wisdom, what is true and good, what is from the Lord—and what is not. And you do that not through your intelligence, not through what and how much you know, but through what and how much you love.

In *Divine Providence* 172, Swedenborg writes, “It follows that the person who is taught from the Word, is taught by the Lord alone. But everyone is taught according to the understanding of their love: what goes beyond this does not remain.” He also says,

“Leave is granted to no spirit, or angel, to teach any person in this earth divine truths; but the Lord teaches everyone through the Word, and teaches them in the proportion that they receive from the Lord good in the will; and they receive it in proportion as they shun evils as sins” (*De Verbo* 13.2). And, in *Arcana Coelestia*, he says, “The Lord does not openly teach anyone truths, but leads them through good to think what is true . . .” (5952.2).

Swedenborg is saying that you cannot learn beyond the limits of your capacity to love. What you understand and truly learn is limited not by your intelligence but by the extent of your goodness. It has been demonstrated over and over again, from the time of Jesus to the present day, that it is entirely possible to be extremely intelligent and know all kinds of information, even about the Bible and spiritual matters, and still be a profoundly unloving and unkind person.

If you leave here this morning with one idea, let it be this: the key to heaven depends entirely upon the quality of your relationship with the Lord and the quality of your relationship with your neighbors, and that quality is not about how smart you are, or how much you know. It is about how deeply and sincerely you love. You can memorize facts, you can memorize Bible passages, you can teach doctrine to thousands of other people, but if you do not have love in your heart, it amounts to nothing more than the empty clanging of that gong that Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 13.

This does not mean learning is pointless! It means that to truly learn and absorb teachings, you must do it with an open and loving heart. We learn divine truth by knowing divine love. We get to the truth by loving God and by expressing that love sincerely in the world to the people around us. Most importantly, we learn not by idolizing our teachers or preachers but by putting into practice the things we see and hear from them that resonate with and affirm what we love and understand of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I hope you were paying attention to our New Testament reading this morning, for while I have nothing to teach you, there is yet one who has more to teach you than you can ever learn.

“You are not to call them teacher, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ” (Matthew 23:8-10).

*To truly learn
and absorb
teachings, you
must do it with
an open and
loving heart.*

Daily Meditations

Monday, May 7

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. *Genesis 6:11-12*

Where the will is not, there is no understanding; and as the will is, such is the understanding. The most ancient people had a will of good, because they had love to the Lord; and from this they had an understanding of truth, but this understanding wholly perished with the will. *Arcana Coelestia 628*

Tuesday, May 8

And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. *Genesis 6:13*

A kind of rational truth, however, as well as natural good, remained with those who are called "Noah," and therefore they could be regenerated. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, May 9

"Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. *Genesis 6:14-15*

[The person of the Ancient] church must be reformed as to that part of man which is called the understanding, before he could be reformed as to the other part which is called the will. It is here described how the things of the will were separated from those of the understanding, and were, as it were, covered over and reserved, lest anything should touch the will. *Arcana Coelestia 641*

Thursday, May 10

"For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Genesis 6:17-18

When the way for remains is closed, the man is no longer man, because he can no longer be protected by angels, but is totally possessed by evil spirits, whose sole study and desire it is to extinguish man. Hence came the death of the antediluvians, which is described by a flood, or total inundation. *Arcana Coelestia 660*

Friday, May 11

"And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. *Genesis 6:19-20*

Truths cannot be regenerated except through goods and delights; nor therefore the things of faith, except through those which are of charity. And for this reason it is said here that "pairs" of all should enter in, that is, both of truths which are of the understanding, and of goods which are of the will. *Arcana Coelestia 671*

Saturday, May 12

"Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. *Genesis 6:21-22*

Before a man can be regenerated he needs to be furnished with all things that may serve as means: with the goods and delights of the affections as means for the will; and with truths from the Word of the Lord, and also with confirmatory things from other sources, as means for the understanding. *Arcana Coelestia 677*

MOTHER'S DAY

Rev. Eric Hoffman

Isaiah 66:6-13

Listen, an uproar from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, dealing retribution to his enemies! Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children. Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord; shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her— that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom. For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

Sermon

In the early part of this century, a man by the name of James M. Beck wrote a short essay entitled "The Laurels of a Mother." I'd like to share part of that essay with you:

...The future of any country is entirely dependent upon the mothers of the children who are to be its future custodians. The mother's trust is even greater than that of our statesmen. When we praise one of our great statesmen, he is only reaping the reward of the everlasting care of his mother. As one of our presidents has said, "All that I am, and all that I expect to be, I owe to my saintly mother."

In times of adversity we may be deserted by everyone else, but we may still be sure of the love of the woman whom we call "Mother." The most hardened of criminals, hated by all men, no matter how wild he is or has been, can find a resting place for his head in his mother's lap.

The world knows nothing of its greatest personages. They are around about us in cottage and in hovel. Among the humblest homes and among the humblest women there is a more divine heroism than that of Joan of Arc. These women, unconscious of their heroism, walk with courage and fortitude through the "valley of the shadow of death" in order that they may add their treasures to the world's greatest riches. Indeed it is not the kings who are crowned and praised. It is not the statesman with his midnight lamp. It is not the warrior stained with blood; it is the queen of the home who under God rules the destinies of mankind. I say to you that the sweetest wisdom in the world is a mother's counsel, and the purest altar from which a human prayer ever went to heaven is a mother's knee.

This is typical of the writing of the day, filled with flowery prose and reflecting many of the cultural standards of turn-of-the-century America (they obviously held their politicians in very high regard). Even so, these words convey a deep sense of admiration for mothers—apparently trapped in their hovels and slaving away for the good of the household.

There is no doubt in my mind that these words were written in sincerity, but still they are not quite adequate to describe the opportunity that Mother's Day affords us. It's one thing to set aside some time to acknowledge our mothers and to commend them out of the very special place they have in our hearts—as Beck has done—yet we can take this formal recognition a step further by making an effort to really appreciate motherhood. We can try to understand, as much as we are able, what those who have been blessed with motherhood go through on a daily basis. We can find

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out how we can be of service to them out of the same degree of love they have shown for us.

There is a myth in our society concerning motherhood, one held by children and adults alike. Jane Swigart, in a wonderful book subtitled *The Emotional Realities of Mothering*, calls it “the myth of the Good Mother/Bad Mother.” On the one hand, we have the Good Mother, “a woman who wants only the best for her children, whose needs she intuits effortlessly, who adores her children and finds them fascinating, who is so attuned to her children and is so resourceful that she is immune to boredom. To the Good Mother, nurturing comes as naturally as breathing, and child-rearing is a source of pleasure that does not require discipline or self-sacrifice.” On the other hand, there is the Bad Mother, “who is essentially bored by her children, indifferent to their well-being, who is so narcissistic and self-absorbed [that] she cannot discern what is in the best interests of her children. She is insensitive to their needs, unable to empathize with them, and often uses them for her own gratification. She damages her children without knowing it. Unable to learn from the suffering she causes, she is incapable of change.”

Now, these are obviously two extremes. In reality, there is no such thing as either the perfect mother who will never make mistakes or the perfectly rotten mother who is the bane of all goodness and decency. But these extremes do express the standards and expectations we tend to place on motherhood. If a person is a success in life, then he or she was likely raised by a Good Mother, but if that person carries any emotional scars that can be connected to their maternal upbringing, then he or she has a Bad Mother. Mothers in general are placed under a great deal of pressure to become and remain Good Mothers. Our mothers may have had their moments, but in reality, the myth is impossible to sustain.

The first step any one of us can take to fully appreciate the mothers among us is to realize that they are human beings and must be permitted to have shortcomings, like all human beings do, without being unfairly labeled by the rest of us. No mother can be expected to be perfect all the time. It is unfair to them to demand such rigorous standards of performance. We need to grant our mothers freedom of expression without undue recrimination. Please remember that parenthood is not the easiest job in the world, and it doesn't come naturally. Just like the rest of us, mothers are allowed to be less than perfect and still receive our respect.

I often look back on my own childhood, and it really astounds me all the things my mother has done for me (and those are just the things that I'm aware of!). My mother is human. There have been times when she has been the most loving and capable nurturer in the world, and times when she has seemed like the Wicked Witch of the West. But I also know that she has accepted perhaps the most difficult calling in the world, and has done a marvelous job. Both she and I have been changed by her efforts. When that inevitable time came when I had to let go of her hand and find my own place in the world—when I needed to say, “Madam, you have your responsibilities and I have mine”—I had the strength and self-reliance to do so. That is a gift that not everyone in this world can give a person.

We all know that there are all kinds of mothers out there: mothers and stepmothers; working mothers, grandmothers and mothers-in-law; mothers who may have left us too early and mothers who may never let us go; mothers who fill every square centimeter of gray between the two extremes. They all have at least one thing in common (it turns out that Beck was right in this): there has never been a mother who has not known love for her children.

How do we honor our mothers this day? Thank her for what she has given you. Try to see things from her point of view from time to time. Help her out when she is too tired to go on. Give her an opportunity to express what she is thinking and feeling, and listen to her. Tell her what is in your heart. Love the one who helped to teach you what love is. And if you are still at a loss for a tribute, take the advice of the poet Suzan L. Wiener:

*Mother's Day is special,
I hope they stop and think,
And give me that best gift of all:
No dishes in the sink!*

Meditation

Let nothing disturb you, nothing alarm you:
While all things fade away, God is unchanging.
Be patient,
And you will gain everything:
For with God in your heart nothing is lacking.
God meets your every need.

- St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Monday, May 14

These are Solomon's measurements for building the house of God: the length, in cubits of the old standard, was sixty cubits, and the width twenty cubits.

2 Chronicles 3:1-2

The exteriors of the temple in Jerusalem, as well, represented the types of good and truth that exist in the Word's literal meaning. *True Christian Religion 221*

Tuesday, May 15

The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits long, across the width of the house; and its height was one hundred and twenty cubits. He overlaid it on the inside with pure gold. *2 Chronicles 3:4*

The temple represented heaven and the church just as the tabernacle did, although the temple meant the heaven where the spiritual angels are, while the tabernacle meant the heaven where the heavenly angels are. Spiritual angels have wisdom because of the Word. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, May 16

The nave he lined with cypress, covered it with fine gold, and made palms and chains on it. He adorned the house with settings of precious stones. The gold was gold from Parvaim. So he lined the house with gold—its beams, its thresholds, its walls, and its doors; and he carved cherubim on the walls. *2 Chronicles 3:5-7*

I mentioned that precious stones exist in the spiritual world just as they do in the physical world; their spiritual origin is the truths in the Word's literal meaning. This seems unbelievable, but it is nevertheless the truth. As a result, whenever precious stones are named in the Word, in the spiritual meaning they stand for truths. We are told that the foundations of the wall around the city, the New Jerusalem, were constructed of precious stones. *True Christian Religion 217*

Thursday, May 17

He made the most holy place; its length, corresponding to the width of the house, was twenty cubits, and its width was twenty cubits; he overlaid it with six hundred talents of fine gold. The weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. He overlaid the upper chambers with gold. *2 Chronicles 3:8-9*

In the world, that is called long or broad which is long or broad spatially, the same being true of height. But in heaven, where there is no thought from space, by length is understood a state of good, by breadth a state of truth, and by height the distinction between them in accordance with degrees. *Heaven and Hell 197*

Friday, May 18

In the most holy place he made two carved cherubim and overlaid them with gold. The wings of the cherubim together extended twenty cubits: one wing of one, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and its other wing, five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub; and of this cherub, one wing, five cubits long, touched the wall of the house, and the other wing, also five cubits long, was joined to the wing of the first cherub. *2 Chronicles 3:10-12*

"Cherubim" signify also the inmost heaven because this heaven is in the good of love to the Lord, and the Lord cannot be approached except through the heavens, and into the inmost or third heaven there is nothing admitted that does not savor of the good of that heaven. *Apocalypse Explained 362*

Saturday, May 19

In front of the house he made two pillars thirty-five cubits high, with a capital of five cubits on the top of each. He made encircling chains and put them on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains. He set up the pillars in front of the temple, one on the right, the other on the left; the one on the right he called Jachin, and the one on the left, Boaz. *2 Chronicles 3:15-17*

Those who are in the faith of charity also are in the lower heaven, which is called the spiritual heaven; but those who are in love to the Lord are in the higher heaven, which is called the celestial heaven, and this is sustained by the lower or spiritual heaven.

Apocalypse Explained 219

MAY 20 3 Rs: A PRAYER FOR ACTION

Ms. Christine Laitner

I Kings 17:17-24

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed. He cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again." The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth."

Luke 7:11-17

Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Sermon

This spring, Hannah Court, the street on which I live, is undergoing a complete rebuilding. The city of Midland has some sort of plan for keeping streets usable for many decades through a variety of patching and pothole-filling measures, but there is a point past which the patches outnumber the sections of original pavement, and the patches are regularly

chewed up and spit out by the street cleaner when it visits. Hannah Court, a cul-de-sac that is home to ten houses, has reached the point of needing a complete renovation.

While I'm certain that there's a great metaphor in what right now is pretty much a mess, what actually exists is a lot of dirt, dust, and mud, as well as the pounding and noise of large machinery being run by people who are highly skilled and who really are trying not to take too many branches out of the lovely old trees on this court as they wield their BobCats, cement trucks, and other large vehicles. We who live on Hannah Court have made friends with people two blocks away so that we have somewhere to park our cars, since our driveways are all missing aprons or blocked for various reasons. One might call this "outreach driven by reality" if one were still searching for that metaphor...

And what of the timeline for this project? The city simply told us that it would begin in May and end in June. While that's a little open-ended—something I think about occasionally as I walk the two blocks to and from where my car is parked—I think I'm glad there isn't a specific date, because I, obsessive about such things, would be watching every single day to see if things would be done by the promised end date.

Somehow it seems appropriate that I'm preparing a sermon focused on renewal and revitalization as I'm surrounded by the ongoing mechanical "purring" of heavy equipment. The purring is occasionally interrupted by thumps and bangs, but overall, it reminds me that renovation works best when carefully planned and when the process is undertaken with care for what already exists.

Today's lessons from the Word are about the restoration of life. We can't help but be happy for the two widows whose sons were resurrected. Our theology teaches us that in restoring life to these two sons, the Lord was also restoring completeness in the lives of the widows who were their mothers. The widows represent good without truth; through their sons, who represent truths, the desire for truth on the part of the widows is fulfilled. Swedenborg tells us that truth protects good, so, with the loss of their sons, the widows were left in a precarious state. The joining, or, in this case, the rejoining, of mother with son brings the possibility for new life through the conjunction of good and truth.

Both readings point out the need to bring both good and truth to the process of revitalization. Both stories point out that faith in the Lord—remember

Ezekiel's prayers in our Old Testament reading and the faith in Jesus shown by the widow of Nain in our New Testament reading—is basic to the Lord's leading in the process of revitalization.

I've done a fair amount of reading in the areas of church renewal, learning at what points renewal should take place in the life of a church and by what means. Recently, I read a book entitled *The Hidden Lives of Congregations* by Israel Galindo. He identifies eight stages of congregational life, naming stages three and four, which he calls Adolescence and Prime, as the stages in which he believes a congregation can remain for many decades. The Adolescence-stage congregation is vitally interested in creating programs and carries a sense of excitement into everything it does. As it becomes fully formed organizationally, it moves into the Prime stage—the top of the growth continuum—and continues to be fueled by a mature excitement surrounding the mission, goals, and programs of the church. The Prime stage is a fairly balanced state in the lifecycle of the congregation and can last for a long time.

A congregation in the Prime stage has a confident maturity, a strong identity, and yet it remains open and welcoming to new members. Its life is balanced as far as vision, goals, and programs are concerned. By the time a congregation has reached this level, it has dropped programs that seem not to be particularly useful—and, although well balanced, it has begun to lose a bit of the vitality and energy that fueled its earlier excitement in creating new ways of being. At this stage a congregation can begin to presume that it no longer needs to work at renewal, vision, assessment, and evaluation because it is coming to believe that how things are currently will last forever. It is critical at this point that congregation leaders and members fight the forces that will lead to becoming too comfortable and settled—which, in turn, can lead to atrophy and resistance to change. It is important to engage the creative process while also reviewing and celebrating current programs in order to retool them to keep them fresh.

The process of renewal is central to our doctrines about the ongoing potential for spiritual growth. Regeneration is the great essential to heavenly life. It is the goal, the process, and also a step in the process that as a child I thought of as the “three R's:” repentance, reformation, and regeneration. The Lord's gift is that each of us has a choice every step of the way to choose regeneration. We have the choice

Each of us has the opportunity every step of the way to choose regeneration.

to notice the need to move toward the good, to live in such a way as to support the good—even if we're not yet doing it without careful thought—and finally to have it become such a part of us that we no longer need to will it consciously. The regeneration process is lifelong, spiraling along as we grow spiritually.

On a broader level, this same concept can be applied to institutional change. All institutions regularly need to review and evaluate the work they are doing. In a book written by Alice Mann called *Can Our Church Live?*, the author outlines a process for church life that also could be called “the three Rs.” In this case, they'd be the three Rs of rejuvenation for a church: Renewal, Revitalization, and Redevelopment.

At some point in school you probably learned the structural outline of a short story using a diagram that looked like an inverted letter V. There were little names attached to this upside-down V shape. The lowest left-hand end of the line was called “Introduction” or something like that. From that point, the upward diagonal line was called “rising action.” The point at the very tip of the inverted V was identified as the “climax.” The downward diagonal was called “falling action,” and the lowest right-hand point of the inverted V was called the “conclusion” (or, if you wanted to sound highbrow, the “denouement.”)

Alice Mann creates a similar image to depict the life of a church. There is a beginning (birth), there is growth (formation), there is the high point in the life of the group (stability), and then there is a downward journey (decline) until the institution ends its useful life (death). It's on the “past the peak” journey that Renewal, Revitalization, and Redevelopment can occur.

Renewal

If a congregation is aware in the early stages of its decline that change is needed in the life of the church and then investigates and begins methods of renewal, it's like a line coming from near the top of the “falling action” side that swings back over to the “rising action” diagonal. The need for change is diagnosed and stepped into early, and renewal can take place.

Revitalization

If a congregation waits a little longer to notice the need for change, then, when it decides to implement new processes, the line swinging back to the “rising”

side connects about halfway up the diagonal. This is “revitalization,” and there’s a longer climb to move up to the peak.

Redevelopment

Finally, if a congregation waits until nearly the end of its useful life so that many programs and practices have already fallen by the wayside, research shows that the only way to infuse new life into the organization is to find new ways of practice as well as revitalizing the community. In this case, the lifeline swinging back to the “rising side” connects at nearly at the bottom of that diagonal line and will become a nearly brand new path on the “rising action” side of the inverted V. It’s a long journey back to the top, requiring patience, knowledge, and new practices.

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great* and of a later monograph that applied his business-restructuring techniques to the social sector, says that “greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness ... is largely a matter of choice and discipline.”

Regeneration asks us to choose a path and follow the actions it dictates. The period of reformation is a period of self-discipline that leads ultimately to the incorporation of something new. Choosing to work on change and following the discipline of the practice resulting from that change is the connection between spiritual regeneration and the revival or rejuvenation of the church.

George Dole, in *A Thoughtful Soul*, identifies congregations as “communities of the spirit” and reminds us that the goal of creation is the formation of a heaven from the human race. Thus, he states, we should be alerted to the importance of community in the theology of Emanuel Swedenborg. The church exists solely to support the processes that nurture heavenly community. The value of worship is that it strengthens the understanding of and the will to heavenly community. Church, then, as a community and a center for worshiping the Lord and giving us training in spiritual growth, is essential to our development toward the Lord’s design and wish for us. The church is the Lord’s heaven on earth.

Life is restored to balance with the Lord’s help. The Lord allows us each to choose regeneration as an ongoing spiritual growth process throughout our lives, and when we do make the choice, we need to actively work at it. Likewise, congregations need to recognize when the organization begins to decline and, with discernment, choose the corrective actions that should be taken to revitalize it—to restore it to new life. My early reference to all of the work being

done on my street reminds us that occasionally things need to be taken back to their origins in order to be revitalized through redevelopment.

Today is a call to action. It is a call to bring prayerful consideration to the life of the church. It is a call to listen for guidance from the Lord to review, refresh, and renew the programs and community life of the church. It is a reminder that good and truth are both needed to make the process of revival work. Renewal, revitalization, revival—none of these things occurs in a vacuum. Each of us is asked to act to reinvigorate the life of the church as well as to renew and grow our own spiritual selves.

Each morning at the Almont New Church Assembly, there is a flag ceremony in which first the American flag and then the red-and-white Almont flag are raised. At the close of this flag raising, the following words are spoken: “I give my heart, my head, and my hands to my church; one God, one church, and our flag, love and wisdom.” We will succeed as a church when we bring these three aspects of our being—our hearts (our love), our heads (our wisdom), and our hands (our use and service) together.

And so we pray:

Lord, hear us as we ask your guidance to discern the forward path of renewal and revival, not only for our own spiritual regeneration but also for the vitality of our church. Let us feel your leading and then step out boldly to act with love and wisdom through our service and use. Amen.

Prayer

O God the King of glory,

You are exalted in your heavenly kingdom.

Leave us not comfortless, we pray, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us.

God of eternal truth,

Whose life-quickening love, revealed in the suffering, dying, and rising of your Son, ascends above all human frailty,

In your mercy, fill us with that same love,

That our resurrected lives may reflect the glory of the love that conquers sin and death;

In and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Frank Topping (adapted)

Monday, May 21

He made an altar of bronze, twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high.

2 Chronicles 4:1-2

The altar symbolizes the church in respect to the goodness of its love, and those who worship there symbolize the church in respect to its formal worship.

Apocalypse Revealed 486

Tuesday, May 22

Then he made the cast sea; it was round, ten cubits from rim to rim, and five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely. Under it were panels all round, each of ten cubits, surrounding the sea; there were two rows of panels, cast when it was cast. *2 Chronicles 4:3*

It should be remembered that there is Providence and there is Foresight. Good is what the Lord provides, while evil is what the Lord foresees. The one must exist alongside the other, if a person is to be led by the Lord; for what comes from the person is nothing other than evil, but what comes from the Lord is nothing other than good. *Arcana Coelestia 10781*

Wednesday, May 23

It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east; the sea was set on them. The hindquarters of each were towards the inside. *2 Chronicles 4:4*

This is why the cardinal directions in heaven mean the qualities of the people who live there. The east means love and its good clearly perceived, the west the same dimly perceived, the south wisdom and intelligence in clear light, and the north the same in dim light. *Heaven and Hell 150*

Thursday, May 24

Its thickness was a handbreadth; its rim was made like the rim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held three thousand baths. He also made ten basins in which to wash, and set five on the right-hand side, and five on the left. In these they were to rinse what was used for the burnt-offering. The sea was for the priests to wash in. *2 Chronicles 4:5-6*

For good is continually flowing in from the Lord, but when it comes through the internal or spiritual man to his external or natural man, it is there either perverted, turned back, or suffocated. But when the things which are of the love of self and of the love of the world are removed, then good is received there and is made fruitful; for then man practices the works of charity. *Arcana Coelestia 3147.2*

Friday, May 25

He made ten golden lampstands as prescribed, and set them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north. He also made ten tables and placed them in the temple, five on the right-hand side and five on the left. And he made one hundred basins of gold.

2 Chronicles 4:7-8

Something brief must be stated here to explain why the lampstand was to be made from pure gold. "The lampstand" means the Divine Spiritual or Divine Truth emanating from the Lord, as it exists in heaven and in the Church. Because this Truth has its origin in Divine Good the lampstand was made from gold; for as has been stated, "gold" means good. This is more plainly evident from the manner in which the Lord flows into the heavens. *Arcana Coelestia 9549*

Saturday, May 26

He made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court; he overlaid their doors with bronze. He set the sea at the south-east corner of the house. *2 Chronicles 4:9-10*

There were two courts to the temple, one without the temple, and the other within; the court without the temple signifies the very entrance into heaven and the church, where those are who are being introduced into heaven, and the court within the temple represents the ultimate heaven. *Apocalypse Explained 630.3*

Luke 15:11-24

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Arcana Coelestia **8816**

It often says in the Bible that when the Lord God comes it causes a huge effect with things like the earth quaking and mountains collapsing and people quivering. What it means basically is that the presence of God shakes everything up because the nature of God is such that no one can bear this presence unless he or she is in some way protected and able to encounter God's presence. Divinity is like the fire inside the sun; if it were to fall on people directly it would devour them in an instant, so it has to be with people in a way that is safe for them to have that presence, and this is most of all, in the good that people have and feel and use in their lives.

Let's say that each of us knows about thirty people very well—so well that we know what they are like as far as we can ever know that: we know what they enjoy, what they don't like, what rubs them the wrong way, what they love doing and what they struggle with, and so on. In fact, we know them pretty well, so well that we have really deep, strong feelings about them and for them. If they are happy and life is sweet, we are delighted to hear it, and if they are upset or ill or going through it, well, we want to just reach out and give them a hug. These wonderful people we're particularly close to like that are in our hearts, and we have such a lot of affection for them!

It's that word "affection" that we're going to stay with for a bit. This affection, and having it and feeling it and giving it, is undoubtedly the most important thing we ever have, as people and as people with other people. Have it, and you can be a walking disaster in many other ways and that's OK, you've got the one thing that really matters: affection. Don't have it, and you can have the best house and garden, win the lottery every time, be a supermodel, know Chinese like you were born speaking it, and what have you got? It is that serious!

Affection is so big, and so important, that I can't tell you how much. Arthur Stace famously went round Sydney for years with his chalk, writing the word "Eternity" on pavements and walls wherever he could, to keep it right there in people's attention. I sort of feel I would want to do that, but do it with the word "affection" instead. And my logic tells me that if I've got genuine affection, then eternity is kind of going to look after itself.

Well, here I am preaching, which is my version of chalking the pavements—but rather than just jumping up and down about how important affection is, I want to fill in some of the cracks and take you into the idea properly. Go back to those thirty people or so that each of us knows very well, and keep hold of the idea that you have a lot of affection for each one of them. These thirty people are of course amazingly different: some are very relaxed and easy to be with, some are a bit awkward, some of them you would like to shake up and down at times, some are sociable, some are shy, some breeze through life, and some just seem to walk on eggshells. But they all have this one thing in common: they have your undying affection. When you think about them, you smile.

So why are we like that? How is it possible? Well, of course, the real answer is that it's because of God. But

while that says everything, it doesn't really explain everything to us very well. But with this affection that we have and give, we are relaying something of God through us and back out to people.

I want to emphasize very carefully that our affection is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling. That can certainly be one part of it, of course, and I am sure that, at the deepest-down level, a wonderfully warm feeling towards a particular person or towards people generally is driving the bus. But true affection is not warm-fuzzy in the slightest, because warm-fuzzy usually means you are in it for something you are getting from it, and that's neither affection nor God. The other worrying thing about warm-fuzzy is that it's basically pure gloss and come what may, and it's us making out that everything's all right really. Technically, it's love without a scrap of wisdom.

But don't ditch the word "warm," for goodness' sake, or else you may go to the other extreme and be truth without a scrap of love! Jesus often talks about dealing with your neighbour's faults—he even uses the word "rebuke." Listen to this: "It is impossible that no offences should come, but woe to him through whom they do come. [Note the way that is being put!] It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents and turns from the sin, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in one day and seven times in one day returns to you, you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:1-4).

If you look at that statement very carefully, you will recognize that underneath the rebuke or the issue, there is something far, far greater still: the warm feeling we're calling affection. You are speaking out, stating your case for sure, but it's coming from the affection you have in your heart—and the imperative thing is that any rebuke we give must convey something of the affection we're feeling. Otherwise, we are just clubbing somebody with a baseball bat.

The ancient Greeks had a word that basically meant all the vital organs in your body, but particularly your heart, your lungs, your stomach, and your intestines. They believed—quite rightly—that a very close link exists between your vital organs and your strongest emotions, especially anger, worry, fear, and love. They believed that these strong emotions were right there in those physical organs. We get a bit of that

idea when we talk about "deep within my breast" and "not being able to stomach something"—but the point is that this word they used gradually developed to become the idea of our being moved with compassion to the very depths of our being. Notice the obvious link with vital organs!

The gospels use this same word to express things like "and Jesus, seeing the multitude, was moved with compassion for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd." He wasn't annoyed with them, or angry; he was sorry for them, sorry about how it was for them, and yearned from the very depths of his being that it might be so different. It was the same with a leper and a man with an epileptic son and a woman with her dead son. The Pharisees tended to claim that people like that had brought their troubles on themselves, in the same way that today some people say physical problems are all due to wrong attitudes and that if you've got a bad back you should take a very good look at why (an attitude I would put in the ghastly basket!). But Jesus felt enormous pity and never disgust. And he did something about each case, but it always came from this affection in the very depths of his being.

*Let affection
allow God to
sculpt you into
a work of art.*

But our affection is not only to be there in the very depths of our being. That's fine for us, of course, but it doesn't help someone else who may be left guessing. In some way it's got to show itself—remember, Jesus acted and demonstrated his pity—and while we can't go round and make blind people see and dead people come back to life, we have something. We have faces! Faces, and especially eyes, are windows into our soul. You can't help what your face looks like, but the look on your face is a different matter. Learn to read a face well—forget the words and the lipstick and the chiseled or not-so-chiseled jaw—and get into the look of longing on a face, the tenderness, and when you see it, say, "Aha, that's beautiful. That is affection coming from the very depths of their being." What you're doing is seeing God—and God can make the blind see and the dead come back to life. Let it be the same with you, and let affection allow God to sculpt you into a work of art, so that you look with visible tenderness at whatever else might be going on.

I am going to finish with the Aaronic blessing because it fits everything I've said: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." Amen indeed.

Daily Meditations

Monday, May 28

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Psalm 122:1

The kind of joy of the thought is expressed by the words of the song, which concur and agree with the matter that is in the thought from the heart; the kind of joy of the heart is expressed by the harmony, and the measure of this joy is expressed by the exaltation of the sound and the words in it. *Apocalypse Explained 326*

Tuesday, May 29

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. *Psalm 122:2-3*

There were three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west, because the east symbolizes love and an affection for goodness in a higher degree, thus in greater measure, whereas the west symbolizes love and an affection for goodness in a lower degree, thus in lesser measure; and the south symbolizes wisdom and an affection for truth in a higher degree, thus in greater measure, whereas the north symbolizes wisdom and an affection for truth in a lower degree, thus in lesser measure. *Apocalypse Revealed 901*

Wednesday, May 30

To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. *Psalm 122:4*

In general the twelve tribes signified all things of the doctrine of truth and good, or of faith and love; for these (that is, truth and good, or faith and love) constitute the Lord's kingdom; for the things of truth or faith are the all of thought therein, and the things of good or love are the all of affection.

Arcana Coelestia 3858

Thursday, May 31

For there the thrones for judgement were set up, the thrones of the house of David. *Psalm 122:5*

In general that which is lower is like a throne for the higher; for the higher is and acts therein, and indeed through the lower, and what is done appears as if done by the lower, because, as just said, it is done through it.

Arcana Coelestia 5313

Friday, June 1

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers." *Psalm 122:6-7*

"Jerusalem" does not mean Jerusalem, but the church in relation to doctrine and worship; "peace" means everything of doctrine and worship, for when these are from a heavenly origin, that is, out of heaven from the Lord, then they are from peace and in peace, from which is evident what is meant by "ask for the peace of Jerusalem;" and as those who are in that peace are said to be "tranquil," it is also said, "let them be tranquil that love thee," that is, that love the doctrine and worship of the church. *Apocalypse Explained 365.35*

Saturday, June 2

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. *Psalm 122:8-9*

Therefore, all the sons of Israel represented the Lord's heavenly kingdom, that is, the kingdom of love and charity; among each other they were called "brethren," and also "companions"; but the latter, that is, "companions," not from the good of love, but from the truth of faith. *Arcana Coelestia 2360*

Deuteronomy 6:1-19

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the Lord your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth. Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

You must diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his decrees, and his statutes that he has commanded you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may go in and occupy the good land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you, thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Sermon

In the opening chapter of the Bible we find the words, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The Bible story begins with man created, tells of his first state when he lived close to the Lord, how he turned to self and lost his paradise, and of the continued efforts of the Lord to bring man back into close relationship with Himself, The means to this are the truths of the Word.

All the Lord’s commandments are divine truths. They have their origin in the divine nature and their sanction in the immutable order of the divine wisdom. Man becomes the image of God and is conjoined to Him in the degree in which he learns and lives the Lord’s commandments.

Many of the Lord’s commandments and precepts are prohibitions. This is because of our ignorance. We need to be told not to do those things which will injure us. But the form in which a principle is stated does not change its character. All the laws and statutes of

the Word are given in the form best adapted to secure their recognition and obedience.

They are laws inherent in the divine nature, and so are the laws for our growth and development. They are the laws of the divine life and the laws of true human life.

When the Lord commands us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, He is only stating in the form of a commandment a primary and fundamental law of our being. He Himself calls it the "first and great commandment of the law"; that is, the first in importance and great in the goodness which comes through it. The good which comes by obedience to it is the highest end of life, the greatest attainment that anyone can procure.

It is a matter of common observation that all our happiness and all our misery flow from love: our happiness from the love of what is good and true, and our misery from the love of the evil and false. The higher the object of our love, the greater is our happiness. He who loves only physical ease and comfort has a kind of negative, animal-like happiness which consists merely in not being miserable. He who loves knowledge for the sake of knowing finds a stimulus to activity and a reward which mere physical life cannot give. He who sincerely loves his fellow men and seeks to help them and to do them good lives in a state of happiness far above that of those interested only in intellectual pursuits. The love of family and children is a more interior love and brings greater joys than can come from the delights of mere friendship. It is a universal truth that the higher our love is, the happier we are.

The command to love the Lord is not an arbitrary law. The divine love is not the love of ruling or of receiving homage. This law is one given us by a Lord who knows what is best for us, and is the law which, if obeyed, will bring the greatest blessings.

The questions then arise, "How can we love the Lord?" and "How can we express our love for Him?" The Lord has given us a plain and direct answer in the words of our text: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

This is, however, a general answer, and to bring it to practical application involves knowledge of the basic truths concerning the Lord. We cannot love a being of whom we can form no idea. To know nothing about God is to be godless. Nor can we love a mere creative force. We cannot love an abstraction. It is

therefore impossible to love the Lord without forming some distinct idea of His character and believing in Him as a real and personal being—and throughout the Scriptures He is described as a personal being. Nor can we love a divine being who is vengeful and arbitrary. We might fear such a God, but we could not love Him. The teachings of the New Church are clear and definite here. The Lord is the one divine and perfect Man, infinite in love, wisdom, and power; and we are created in His image and likeness.

Love and wisdom are human qualities, and we can form an idea of them from their existence in us. Whatever genuine love and wisdom we may have are from the Lord; though the divine love and wisdom are infinitely above our love and wisdom in both degree and in quality, they are yet similar.

We are not to love the Lord as a person apart from His character, as some parents love their children. If we will analyze our love for our fellow men, we shall see that we do not love them merely as persons but as the embodiment of certain qualities that are congenial to us. We love others according to the degree in which they possess qualities of mind and heart which are homogeneous to our own natures. Two persons may be very similar in appearance, but we may like one and not the other. Also, it is not uncommon for us to meet people whom we do not like at first but come to love when we learn their true character. If it were the person we loved and not the qualities in the person, one might love a statue.

It is the divine qualities or attributes in the Lord that we are to love. If we love those qualities wherever they are found, we love Him who is their embodiment and source. If we love innocence and purity of heart, if we love obedience to truth, if we love unselfish devotion to the welfare of others, if we love goodness and truth in others, provided also that we seek to develop these qualities in ourselves, we love the Lord. For these are divine qualities, and to love the quality and character of anyone is to love him who possesses it. Those who love to do the commandments of the Lord love the Lord.

We do not have to know people personally to love them. There are those we know through their writings and the record of their deeds. There are many long gone before us to whom we owe much who are a constant inspiration to us, and for whom we feel a strong degree of affection. In the same way we can love the Lord. Though we cannot see Him with our physical eyes, we may know that He is perpetually present with us, giving us life, guiding, and protecting us every moment.

We should be careful to distinguish between love and mere feelings or emotions. There are those who make the loudest professions of affection for others, yet who will do nothing for those whom they pretend to love. Love which does not express itself in actions is not love. One may say “Lord, Lord,” but not do the things which the Lord commands. Some think that the Lord does not need our help. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” We cannot give anything to the Lord which He does not already possess. Yet He needs us, for He created us to be the means of receiving love and wisdom from Him and using these gifts in the service of others. Each one of us has relations to others and opportunities of doing them good that no one else has the power to do. If we do our tasks faithfully, we are helping the Lord. We do not show our love just by telling a person that we love him. In fact, the more we love others, the less we are inclined to talk about it. Love is not a form of words. It expresses itself in acts.

We can show our love to the Lord in every field of human activity. We can show it in seeking the material welfare of mankind, in doing our tasks well in the service of the community in which we live, in seeking the political welfare and freedom of the state and of the nation, and especially in seeking to know the divine purposes for us and to carry them out.

If we do these things, we love the Lord, praise Him in every daily task, and worship Him in every deed. To love the Lord with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength is to seek to learn of Him, to know His will, and to do His commandments in all the uses of our daily lives. Amen.

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Daily Meditations

Monday, June 4

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. *Deuteronomy 10:12-13*

What “fearing God” signifies in the Word, may be seen from a great many passages when understood as to the internal sense. The “fear of God” there signifies worship, and indeed worship either from fear, or from the good of faith, or from the good of love; worship from fear when the non-regenerate, worship from the good of faith when the spiritual regenerate, and worship from the good of love when the celestial regenerate are treated of. *Arcana Coelestia 2826*

Tuesday, June 5

Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. *Deuteronomy 10:14-15*

Wherever there is charity, even among nations most remote from the church, there is “seed,” for heavenly seed is charity. No man can do anything of good from himself, but all good is from the Lord. The good which the Gentiles do is also from the Lord, of whom, by the divine mercy of the Lord, hereafter... The “seed of God” is faith. *Arcana Coelestia 1025*

Wednesday, June 6

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

“Widows” signify those, both women and males, who are in good and not in truth and yet desire truth, thus those who are without defense against falsity and evil, but who are defended by the Lord.

Apocalypse Explained 1121

Thursday, June 7

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear.

Deuteronomy 10:19-20

When the natural of man is separated from his spiritual, which is effected chiefly by the love of self, then from the evils of that love falsities flow forth, for every falsity is from an evil, for the falsity is the protector of the evil, and the evil of the will takes form in the understanding by means of the ideas of the thought, and these ideas are called falsities... The falsities that flow forth from the evils of the love of self have in them pride, for man then thinks from what is his own; therefore “Egypt” here signifies also the pride of self-intelligence. *Apocalypse Explained 654*

Friday, June 8

He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. *Deuteronomy 10:21*

They are said to be in spiritual captivity who as to their interiors are kept by the Lord in good and truth, but as to their exteriors are kept by hell in evil and falsity, whence there is a combat of the external man with the internal. *Arcana Coelestia 7990*

Saturday, June 9

Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven. *Deuteronomy 10:22*

Stars appear also in the angelic heaven, but they are appearances from the knowledges of good and truth, therefore they appear around those who are in those knowledges, especially when they turn them over in the mind, and are in the desire of knowing them.

Apocalypse Explained 402

GIFT OF LAW, GIFT OF GRACE

Rev. Sarah Buteux

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

Sermon

I used to sing regularly with three other friends in a group called Missing Rachel. Back in August 2008, the last of the Rachels, Rebekah, got married to a nice young man by the name of Scott. Their wedding was unlike any other I have ever attended.

For one thing, they were married in the cathedral of our sister denomination, the General Church, down in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, which would have been an experience in and of itself simply because that space is so incredibly beautiful. But most of all, it was one of the few weddings I have been to where I felt that all the abundant time, energy, and talent expended had been poured into the parts of a wedding that really matter. The music wasn't filler but an act of worship. The food at the potluck reception was a gift from all the people who knew and loved Rebekah and Scott. And the ceremony wasn't an ode to romantic love but

a call to commitment grounded in the same reading from Exodus you heard today.

10 JUN

That's right. Rather than hear those familiar words about love being patient and kind, not arrogant or rude, we listened as the pastor spoke about the Ten Commandments, about this young couple's hopes and dreams of living out a life together that would honor their promises to one another, and about how those promises rested upon the strength and support of their community.

Scott and Rebekah wanted all of us to know that they had no illusions about marriage being easy. They wanted us to know that they had no hope of holding their union together on their own. They stood before us all, pledged their troth to each other, and asked us as they did so for our love and support. They asked all of the people assembled to bolster them up, to hold them accountable, and to help keep them together. They chose these words from Exodus because the Ten Commandments are much more than just a list of Don'ts with a few Dos thrown in for good measure: they are a blueprint, a set of guidelines, a map to help us live well, in community, together, and they wanted a healthy community around them as they began their new life as husband and wife.

Well, I've done a lot of weddings in my day, and I've heard a lot of poetry and words of wisdom, but never have I heard the Ten Commandments read at a wedding before. I suppose this is because people think of them as kind of a downer. People want to hear about love and happy endings at weddings. Honor, obedience, the possibility of coveting your neighbor's donkey—well, not so much.

But what we too often fail to realize is that these commandments were given as an act of love in order to help us sustain love in a world where love needs all the help it can get. The Ten Commandments are actually one of the most loving passages ever written. Love is the common thread that weaves all these laws together—love for God and love for our neighbor.

So allow me to speak to you for a few minutes about these commandments. I think it is very easy to take the Big Ten for granted—to, on the one hand, assume that we know them and ought to obey them; but on the other hand kind of give up on them, ignore them, even resent them, because deep down we know that we don't obey them very well at all.

The truth is, most people don't even know what the Ten Commandments are. Everyone agrees that they're important, but in a recent poll very few

Americans could remember more than four of them. Has anyone here ever seen The Colbert Report episode where Congressman Lynn Westmoreland appears in support of the movement to have the Ten Commandments displayed on the walls of our public schools and courtrooms? It's a very telling interview. When Stephen Colbert asked him to list them, the congressman couldn't come up with more than three.

It's kind of hard to obey the Ten Commandments if you don't even know what they are. But in fairness to Westmoreland and my fellow Americans, I kind of understand why people don't. You see, I think we actually resist getting too close to the Ten Commandments for much the same reason the Israelites resisted getting too close to God in our reading for today: because they scare us. They overwhelm us. We know we ought to follow them, but we also know we're not really up to the task.

We are intelligent enough to realize that these laws are good and useful and that if we lived up to them our society would actually run fairly smoothly, but man, truth be told, it's hard not to covet sometimes. It's hard not to compare ourselves to others, hard not to want what they have.

I don't have such a hard time restraining myself from murdering people, thank goodness, but then again, nobody's ever really given me just cause. I *have* had trouble honoring my parents. Very lovely people, my parents. But brothers and sisters, I have buttons, they know where to find them, and those two lovely people are not afraid to push!

Moving back up the list to number four, I will readily admit that I'm a total failure at the whole remembering the Sabbath, resting, and keeping it holy thing. This is pretty much a work day for me, and making your own Sabbath on your own time apart from your faith community is tough. I'd be the better for it, I know I would, but I don't do it so very well.

So the law, for all the good I know it would do me, is not something I uphold particularly well, nor is it something that gives me a lot of pride in myself. Truth be told, it tends to make me feel kind of bad, inadequate—one might even say "sinful"—when I really think about it. But as a Christian, I've also come to realize that this is part of the point.

The great reformed theologians, men like Luther and Calvin (who were really just riffing on Paul in this regard, but we'll give them the credit today) used to say that not living up to the law was actually part

of God's plan. It helps us realize our need for God's grace, God's mercy, and God's forgiveness.

We realize that we cannot do this alone, that we need God if we are to find the strength to do what is right, that we need God when we have lacked that same strength and done what is wrong. The key here, the good news I hope you will all walk away with this morning, is that the God you need is with you. God is with you when you succeed, and God is with you when you fail. God was with the Israelites before he gave them these rules, and he was with them afterward, just as God was with you before you ever heard of these commandments and has remained with you even as you have broken them.

These commandments were not given to us in the hopes that we would live up to them for God's sake and thereby earn God's love or a place at God's table. They were given to us for our own sake, that we might learn to live by them for our own good. But whether we succeed or fail, God is with us. Such was his promise to Abraham and his children; and we are heirs to that same promise even today

So do not shy away from these words in Exodus, but embrace them as your rules for living. Treasure them, for they are God's gift. Learning to obey them with God's help and return to them with God's grace—well, may this be your gift to God.

Amen.

Prayers

Teach us, O Lord,
to serve you with patience,
to follow you with simplicity,
to reverence you with fear,
and to love you with our whole heart;
that serving, following, reverencing, and loving
we may behold you in the beauty of holiness
and rest in the presence of your glory,
now and forever.

- Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

O Lord, our strength, our salvation, and our song:
let us never be shaken in our constancy towards you,
or our love towards others; for Christ's sake. Amen.

Daily Prayer, 1941

Monday, June 11

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host!
Psalm 148:1-2

It must be kept in mind that a divine-heavenly sphere of love continually goes forth from the Lord toward all who embrace the doctrine of His church, who are obedient to Him, as children are to their father and mother in the world, who devote themselves to Him, and who wish to be fed, that is, instructed by Him. *True Christian Religion 308*

Tuesday, June 12

Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! *Psalm 148: 3-4*

From this heavenly sphere a natural sphere arises, which is one of love towards infants and children. This is a most universal sphere, affecting not only men, but also birds and beasts and even serpents; nor animate things only, but also things inanimate. *Ibid.*

Wednesday, June 13

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created.
He established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. *Psalm 148:5-6*

But that the Lord might operate upon these even as upon spiritual things, He created a sun to be in the natural world like a father, the earth being like a mother. *Ibid.*

Thursday, June 14

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! *Psalm 148:9-10*

For the sun is like a common father and the earth like a common mother, from the marriage of which all the vegetation that adorns the surface of the earth is produced. From the influx of that heavenly sphere into the natural world come the marvelous developments of vegetation from seed to fruit, and again to new seed.
Ibid.

Friday, June 15

Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike, old and young together!
Psalm 148:11-12

It is from this also that many kinds of plants turn, as it were, their faces to the sun during the day, and turn them away when the sun sets. It is from this also that there are flowers that open at the rising of the sun and close at his setting. It is from this also that the song-birds sing sweetly at the early dawn, and likewise after they have been fed by their mother earth. Thus do all these honor their father and mother. *Ibid.*

Saturday, June 16

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the Lord! *Psalm 148:13-14*

They all bear testimony that in the natural world the Lord provides through the sun and the earth all necessities both for animate and inanimate things.
Ibid.

Exodus 3:1-12

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

John 4:1-24

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John"—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee.

But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews

do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

Heaven and Hell 496-497

496. [After death,] one can tell evil spirits from good ones particularly by the fact that the evil ones pay close attention when conversation is about external concerns and little attention when it is about more inward matters, about what is true and what is good in regard to the church and heaven. They do hear such things, but without any real attention or pleasure. One can also identify them by the fact that they consistently turn toward certain regions, and when they are left to themselves follow paths that lead to them. One can tell what love is leading them from the regions and the paths that they follow.

497. All the spirits who arrive from the world are put in touch with some community in heaven or some community in hell. However, this applies only to their deeper natures, and their deeper natures are not apparent to them as long as they are focused on their outward concerns. This is because their outward concerns cloak their inner ones, especially for people most deeply involved in evil. However, they come out into the open when they arrive at the second state because there their deeper levels are opened and their outer ones become dormant.

Sermon

And when the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush and said, "Moses! Moses!" and he said, "Here am I." Exodus 3:4

My basic theme this morning is a very simple one: that the Lord speaks to us wherever we are, so if we want to hear what the Lord is trying to tell us, we must recognize where we are. This is not primarily a matter of our physical location, as our third reading suggests. Each of us, it says, will be put in touch with some community in heaven or in hell, but only as to our deeper natures; and our concern with outward matters "cloaks" our awareness of our inner location. We will not find our way to the eternal community where we belong until we are freed from our preoccupation with our outward location.

That is why we begin our worship services with time to reflect on "where we are" on our life journey. For much of each week, we are necessarily concerned with "external" concerns. We have responsibilities. We need to be at particular places at particular times, taking care of particular things. We need physical food, physical exercise, and physical rest in order to live our lives as human beings. We need shelter and transportation. Granted, most people in this world do not have as many "things" as we do, but the technology of "things" amplifies our individual abilities and enables us to do far more than our ancestors could, at least on the physical level. Swedenborg wrote thousands and thousands of pages with a quill pen. He spent countless hours making his own indexes of the Bible. Imagine what he could have done with a computer!

He could certainly have written more, but would he have written *better*? I suspect that most serious Swedenborgian readers have had times when they wish he had written less. In fact, there seems to be a growing concern that the sheer speed of computers is degrading our capacity for sustained concentration and nourishing the spread of attention deficit disorder.

Magicians deceive us by drawing our attention to something obvious so that we do not notice something less obvious. This could serve as a kind of parable for the way the business of the observable world distracts us from what is going on inside ourselves. A recent book about Bernard Madoff describes how he began by pushing the envelope just a little, until he found himself in a position where he was faced with a choice

between financial disaster and financial chicanery. It sounds as though he did not start out with the intent to defraud but was so intent on material wealth that he avoided observing the gradual erosion of his integrity. He was acutely aware of where he was and where he was going financially, but quite blind to where he was and where he was going ethically.

Incidentally, the story suggests that the same was true of any number of people and institutions who profited from him. In retrospect, it is clear that they did not understand how his funds so consistently far outperformed all others, and wound up having to admit that they "should have known." They simply did not want to know, again distracted by the growth of their wealth.

We can be very sure that the Lord was constantly asking them the same question he asks Adam, the Adam in us all, at the beginning—"Where are you?" Adam, in the Genesis story, gives a most adequate answer. "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). That is, he recognized not only where he was physically but where he was spiritually—afraid, ashamed. Madoff was clearly afraid of financial failure, and we can be quite sure he was afraid of discovering that he was ashamed. Had he admitted that fear of shame, he would have heard what the Lord was asking him. He would have been in the place to which the Lord was speaking.

Let us suppose for a moment, then, that the Lord is asking us at the present moment, "Where are you?" How would we frame our answer? What would be our reference points, our map coordinates?

Ultimately, the most accessible and significant ones would be our relationships with each other. Each of us has a unique place in the total fabric of humanity. No two people have experienced the same family life from the same perspective. Think of identical twins sitting side by side in a first-grade class. Even then, they see the teacher from slightly different perspectives and have different classmates sitting next to them. When they talk to each other, one is listener when the other is speaker. As time goes on they will read different books, marry different spouses, have different children, work at different jobs. No matter how much they have in common, neither will ever be able to occupy the same place in the human fabric as the other.

So when the Lord asks us where we are, this is asking whether we are where we belong in the fabric

*We are all in process.
No viewpoint—
including our own—
is necessarily "final."*

of human relationships. Are we where we best fit, where our particular gifts and interests are needed, and where our needs are best supplied? Are we with the people who best understand and love us, the people whom we best understand and love?

We should not expect crystal-clear answers, but if we are willing to hear the question at all, we will get a least some glimmers of clarity; and those glimmers will inevitably raise the further question, "Where are you going?"

This is actually a more important question than the first. No matter where we find ourselves, we can turn either toward the Lord or away. We can try to understand better or can try to defend our present understanding. The central effort of the Lord's providence is to enable us to act "in freedom according to reason" (*Divine Providence* 71-99), which means that we can assess our circumstances and our goals and can alter our course accordingly.

It means also that everyone we meet has this same freedom, that everyone we meet in is process, in spiritual motion. However, it is by no means true that we are equally free in every sense. We vary widely in our gifts, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Individuals who have lived all their lives in a culture of violence cannot simply decide all at once to trust others. We are all conditioned by our upbringing in many subtle ways, and we do not realize how much we take for granted.

When we meet someone new, it is entirely appropriate that we begin conversation by trying to find common ground. We cannot be sure that we share the same political viewpoint, so we are not likely to declare ourselves on that issue. We can be quite sure, though, that we are both experiencing the same kind of weather. That is usually a safe place to start. Under some circumstances, it is appropriate to begin with questions like "What brings you here?" In any circumstances, it is appropriate to show a willingness to listen, to give the priceless gift of attention.

One particular word comes to mind in this context: "viewpoint." Physically, what we can see depends on where we are situated. From where you are sitting right now, each of you has a unique visual field, most like that of the individuals closest to you, but not identical. At the same time, these views are consistent with each other, so that taken all together, they add up to a more complete picture of this situation than any one of them by itself.

Very much the same can be said of our location in the fabric of human thought and feeling. Because of a

combination of our nature and our nurture, each of us has a unique perspective on the world of relationships, sees that world from a unique viewpoint. I look at the situation in Japan or in Libya or in Bath or in this church, and "from where I stand," this is what I see.

As we get to know others, we discover their viewpoints, never identical to ours. Some we find compatible with our own, some less so, and some so different as to be alarming. Where we truly belong is where there is enough compatibility to make exchange possible and enough difference to make exchange worthwhile.

Obviously, we are not likely to find our place if we start with the assumption that our own viewpoint is the only one that is valid, and it is very difficult indeed to find a constructive "place" in relation to anyone who operates from that assumption. This is what makes it necessary to recognize that we are all in process, that no viewpoint—including our own—is necessarily "final." We all have a lot to learn. Where we need to be going is toward clearer understanding and warmer appreciation.

This brings us back to our third reading with its picture of our external concerns cloaking our inner ones. We all will ultimately shed this cloak when our physical bodies give out. As they move toward that event, they become less and less effective, less and less satisfying. It is as though they were gradually getting out of the way, making it easier for us to see past them and to discover where we are as to our minds and hearts.

The image comes to mind of the body as a radio station whose signal is gradually fading, enabling us to hear a subtler and finer kind of music. Sadly, some of us resist this fading and keep turning up the volume, fighting harder and harder to maintain the illusion of youth.

How much wiser, how much more practical it is to turn down the earthly volume and listen to what the Lord is trying to say to us! One way or another, we will find ourselves asked "Where are you? Where are you going?" Isaiah heard this question in a particularly searching form. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' He answered both the "where" and "whither" implications of these questions with his response: "Here am I. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). Amen.

Monday, June 18

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." *Revelation 21:9*

Love to the Lord is to love and to will those things that are of the Lord, consequently those things that the Lord has commanded in the Word, and love towards the neighbor is to act from that will, thus it consists in the performance of uses, which are effects.

Apocalypse Explained 707

Tuesday, June 19

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. *Revelation 21:10-11*

Wonderful things appear in heaven from the Lord's light, things so beyond number that they could never be told. They are continual representatives of the Lord and of His kingdom, such as are mentioned in the Prophets, and by John in Revelation; besides other significatives. With the bodily eyes no man can possibly see them, but the moment the interior sight or that of the spirit is opened by the Lord, such things become visible. *Arcana Coelestia 1532*

Wednesday, June 20

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.

Revelation 21:12-13

The "gate of heaven" is where angels are with man, that is, where there is an influx of good and truth from the Lord; and thus that as before said there are two gates. *Arcana Coelestia 2851.15*

Thursday, June 21

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.

Revelation 21:22-23

As innocence is the primary thing in the Lord's kingdom, and is the celestial itself there, and as the sacrifices and burnt-offerings represented the spiritual and celestial things of the Lord's kingdom, therefore the very essential of the Lord's kingdom, which is innocence, was represented by lambs.

Arcana Coelestia 3994

Friday, June 22

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.

Revelation 21: 24-25

This is said of the New Jerusalem, by which a new church in the heavens and on earth is signified; "nations" there signify all who are in good; and the "kings of the earth" all who are in truths from good; it is said of both that "they shall bring their glory and honor into it," which means worship from the good of love to the Lord and from the truths of faith which are from the good of charity towards the neighbor.

Apocalypse Explained 288.12

Saturday, June 23

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.

Revelation 21:26-27

"The Lamb's book of Life" means not a book written in heaven, which is to be opened, but the Word, which is from the Lord and which treats of the Lord.

True Christian Religion 107

JUN 24 A NEW HEART AND A NEW SPIRIT

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Matthew 21:23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and

said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Sermon

The prophet Ezekiel states something that sounds simple. He tells us that if we turn from wickedness we will live, and that God will judge each of us according to our ways. He enjoins us to receive a new heart and a new spirit. We find in the prophet a beautiful statement about God's love for the whole human race: God says in Ezekiel, "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone." Our reading concludes with the statement "repent and live!"

This reading is all about personal responsibility. We are to take an active role in our spiritual life. Ezekiel is very optimistic about human power; he simply says, "Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall." In this reading, there is no suggestion that we may not have the power to turn from our offenses. It is simply assumed that we have the power to refrain from evil.

Our tradition believes that humans have the power to turn from evil and do good. God continually knocks at the door, but we must open it. We must respond to God's call. We cooperate with God in our own salvation. We see our relationship with God as one of love. God loves the whole human race—and, as with all lovers, God asks us to love him back. He gives us total freedom to love him or turn from him. Only with free will can our relationship with God be a genuine love relationship. If we were powerless in our relationship with God, then there would be no mutuality in it; we would be programmed human computers. We all know that we cannot compel someone to love us who doesn't. This is a law of love. Think of all the love songs and poems that have been written about spurned lovers! God's love is the same: he wants us all to return his love and unite with him, so he gives us the power to reciprocate.

But we also need to keep in mind those two words, "as if." Although it looks as though we are turning from evil and doing good by our own efforts, this is an illusion; it is God in us giving us that power. In turn, we acknowledge that God gives us the power to turn from evil and do good. We need God's aid, but God's aid comes in the form of personal responsibility.

God gives us the water and soap, but we need to wash ourselves—Swedenborg uses that image to show how we are to turn from evil and do good, as Ezekiel calls us to do.

A person must purify himself from evils and not wait for the Lord to do this immediately; otherwise he may be compared to a servant with face and clothes fouled with soot and dung, who comes up to his master and says, “Wash me, my Lord.” Would not the master say to him, “You foolish servant, what are you saying? See; there are water, soap, and towel. Have you not hands, and power in them? Wash yourself.” And the Lord God will say, “The means of purification are from Me; and from Me are your will and ability; therefore use these My gifts and endowments as your own, and you will be purified.” (*True Christian Religion* 436)

Turning from evil and doing good is a growth process. Swedenborg uses several images about growth to explain our regeneration. At first I had the idea that regeneration was linear; that is, that we shun one sin at a time in a series. Thinking that way, I ignored those passages in Swedenborg’s writings that suggested growth. But I now see that as we turn from evil, heavenly love enters us. The process actually involves the separation of evil from our souls so that we can be filled with God’s love and goodness. So as our evil enjoyments are separated from us, we are filled with good enjoyments. Our whole personality is transformed! This is the new hearts and spirit that Ezekiel talks about. Swedenborg comments on that very passage:

A new heart here means a new will, and a new spirit means a new understanding; for heart in the Word signifies the will, and spirit when joined with heart signifies the understanding. It knows from reason that a regenerate person has a new will and a new understanding, because these two faculties make a person, and they are what are regenerated. Therefore every person is such as he is as to those two faculties. (TCR 601)

As evils are separated from us, heaven is implanted in us. We receive heavenly loves and enjoyments in exchange for evil loves and enjoyments:

It follows that evils with a person are removed and separated, . . . and that evils, as they are removed, avert themselves, and that this takes place in the same degree in which heaven is implanted, that is, as a person is made new (TCR 613).

All the enjoyments we know flow from the things we love. I love music, and so I enjoy writing it and listening to it. I love Carol, so I enjoy being with her. The process of regeneration is a process in which we grow out of one type of enjoyment into another type of enjoyment. Here, Swedenborg uses words that no one today likes to hear about. He talks about sin and evil. Perhaps his choice of terms reflects the Lutheran culture he inherited. Maybe today Swedenborg would have used different language. Maybe he would talk about behaviors being changed, about survival behaviors from dysfunctional environments being replaced with healthy behaviors.

Whatever you call it, I agree with Swedenborg that spiritual growth is in fact growth: we move from one state of being into another, from one form of enjoyment into another. This is what is meant by the blessing we hear from time to time: “The Lord keep our going out and our coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore.” The “going out” is leaving

behind our old way of being, and the coming in is acquiring the healthier, more heavenly ways of being. The main point, though, is that we come into healthier and more heavenly enjoyments. Our old enjoyments lose their appeal as we discover healthier enjoyments.

All affections have their enjoyments; but such as the affections are, such are the enjoyments. Affections for evil and falsity also have their enjoyments; and before a person begins to be regenerated, and receives from the Lord affections for truth and good, those enjoyments appear to be the only ones; so much so, that people believe that no other enjoyments exist, and consequently that if they were deprived of these, they would utterly perish. But they who receive from the Lord the enjoyments of affections for truth and good, see and feel by degrees the nature of the enjoyments of their former life, which they believes to be the only enjoyments--that they are vile in comparison, and indeed filthy. And the farther one advances into the enjoyment of affections for truth and good, the more does the person begin to regard the enjoyments of evil and falsity as vile, and at length to be averse to them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3938)

As we feel healthy loves that are good, and as we delight in truth, maladaptive ways of life become distasteful to us. We just don’t like them anymore. I think of addictions when I read this passage. Addicts come to a point where they are sick and tired of their addiction and the ruin it causes. Then they become

Regeneration is a process in which we grow out of one type of enjoyment into another.

sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. When they reach despair, they put down their addiction. Then they begin to discover all the warm feelings of love and healthy enjoyments—enjoyments that were masked by the numbing effects of substance abuse.

This is true on the spiritual plane as well. Lutherans and Methodists call this phenomenon “sanctifying grace,” and the Reformed call this “sanctification.” A Reformed minister I spoke with recently likened it to God shining a flashlight on our lives. We see in ourselves limitations and maladaptive ways of living and begin to feel the enjoyments of spiritual love. We begin to turn from those areas of self on which God has shined the flashlight. As Paul says, we put off the old self and put on a new self:

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

As we turn away from our limitations, we begin to feel the enjoyments of heaven. As we enlarge our hearts to receive life from God, with His love, we are elevated upward into heaven. The whole process is like our biological birth, from conception, to gestation in the womb, to birth, to education. Our spiritual conception is when we begin to see our evils, or survival mechanisms that no longer work for us. Our spiritual gestation, birth, and education are like the new heart and spirit we acquire. This biological process is a natural image of our spiritual rebirth—what Swedenborg calls a “correspondence.” The whole natural world corresponds to spiritual realities, including the birth process. Swedenborg also compares it to the growth of a tree.

That a person can be regenerated only by successive steps, may be illustrated by the things existing in the natural world, one and all. A tree cannot reach its growth as a tree in a day; but first there is growth from the seed next from the root, and afterward from the shoot, from which is formed the stem; and from this proceed branches with leaves, and at last blossoms and fruits. . . . They who have a different conception of regeneration know nothing of charity and faith, and of the growth of each according to a person’s cooperation with the Lord. It is evident from all this that regeneration is effected in a way analogous to that in which a person is conceived, carried in the womb, born, and educated. (TCR 586)

As God perfects us, with our cooperation, we become fruit trees planted by the still waters of Psalm

1. We become the tree bearing good fruit of Matthew 7:17. With the new heart and new spirit in us, we become angels—whether on this earth or in the next life.

Prayers

Sever us, Lord, from our own selves and graft us into your own being.

Let us perish to ourselves that we may be safe in you.

Let us die to ourselves that we may live in you.

Let us wither to ourselves that we may blossom in you,

And let us be empty to ourselves that we may flourish in you;

Now and forever.

- *Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536)*

Lord, let me be yours.

Let me not draw back, neither from heaven, nor from your divinity, nor your cross.

Let me be yours, to whom I owe both my creation and my redemption.

Touch my heart and sanctify it,

And consecrate me in your service, forever.

- *Lucy Herbert (1669-1744)*

Protect us, O Lord, during this our earthly pilgrimage,

That we may see you diligently, walk with you lovingly, and serve you faithfully;

And, having been ready to do your will in the world,

May we be eager to meet you in the glory of heaven; through Christ our Lord.

- *Richard Baxter (1615-1691)*

Monday, June 25

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to
shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

Psalm 25:1-2

Broadly speaking, angels of all communities are assigned to us to protect us, to lead us away from evil feelings and the evil thoughts that these cause, and to instill good feelings to the extent that we are freely open to them. These serve to control our deeds or works by removing our evil intentions to the extent that this can be done. When angels are with us, they seem to dwell in our affections, near us to the extent that we are engaged in something good because of truth, and distant to the extent that our life is removed from such engagement. *Heaven and Hell 391*

Tuesday, June 26

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Psalm 25:4-5

That “way” denotes truth is from the appearance in the spiritual world, where also there are ways and paths; and in the cities, there appear streets and avenues, and spirits go nowhere else than to those with whom they are consociated by love. From this it is that the quality of the spirits there in regard to truth is known from the way in which they go; for all truth leads to its own love, because that is called truth which confirms what is loved. *Arcana Coelestia 10422*

Wednesday, June 27

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Psalm 25:6-7

Repentance present on the lips does not cause sins to be forgiven; only repentance in life can lead to this. Being Mercy itself, the Lord is constantly forgiving a person's sins; but sins cling to a person no matter how much he supposes them to have been forgiven.

Arcana Coelestia 8393

Thursday, June 28

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees. *Psalm 25:9-10*

The reason why we are not commanded to do what is directly the work of love and charity, but only to avoid doing their opposites, is that in so far as a person shuns evils as sins, so far does he will the good actions of love and charity. *True Christian Religion 329*

Friday, June 29

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.
My eyes are ever towards the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. *Psalm 25:14-15*

To look to the neighbor, to one's country, and to the church, is to look above oneself, because this is to look to the Lord; for the Lord is in charity, and it is of charity to look to the neighbor, to one's country, and to the church, that is, to will well to them. But they look below themselves who turn themselves away from these, and will well only to themselves.

Arcana Coelestia 7815

Saturday, June 30

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. *Psalm 25:16-17*

Meanwhile the Lord continually fights for [one who is regenerating] against evils and falsities, and by combats confirms him in truth and good. The time of combat is the time of the Lord's working; and therefore in the Prophets the regenerate man is called the work of the fingers of God. Nor does He rest until love acts as principal; then the combat ceases. *Arcana Coelestia 63*

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