

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012

SERMONS AND MEDITATIONS OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

OUR DAILY BREAD



Conflict

Prayer

*Bless us,
Christ Jesus:
Your love comes to heal
the wounds of our hearts.
- Brother Roger of Taize*

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

ISSN: 1056-3296 • Volume 64, Number 5
September/October 2012

Published by:

**General Convention of the Church of the New
Jerusalem**

11 Highland Avenue, Newtonville, MA 02460-1852
(617) 969-4240

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter, Editors
43 Hobart Square, Whitman, MA 02382
ourdailybreadmag@gmail.com • (781) 447-4901
www.oddb-online.com

Issued under the auspices of the
Council of Ministers of the Swedenborgian Church
USA & Canada: US \$15/year

Dear Readers,

If you live in the U.S., it's hard not to notice that we are in the midst of a significant election and its attendant political rhetoric (not to mention vitriol). We're not alone; political campaigns throughout the world are rife with extreme statements and language that fan conflict's flames.

But conflict is not unique to politics. It happens all the time and everywhere, only with fewer commercials and a far smaller production budget. After all, strife has beset the human race since time immemorial. The Lord himself was no stranger to conflict; he managed to infuriate a remarkable number of people during his short ministry.

Conflict can be scary, especially for those of us who don't like to cause (or watch) a fuss. And yet conflict also has a purpose: it tends to lay bare what is wrong with a situation, even though sometimes it takes awhile to piece together what all the shouting is really about. Once we understand what problems, fears, or hurts are fanning the flames, we can begin to heal those wounds and address the issues at stake.

As Christians, we are not necessarily called to avoid conflict—especially if truth and love are at stake. We *are* called to remember that all of us are part of a single blessed Creation, “members of the same body” (as both Paul and Swedenborg pointed out), and respond accordingly.

Many blessings, Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter

In This Issue

<i>The Tinderbox Tongue</i>	4
Ms. Leah Grace Goodwin	
<i>The Conflicted Path Toward Peace</i>	7
Rev. Kim Hinrichs	
<i>Time Will Tell</i>	11
Rev. Dr. George F. Dole	
<i>The Cain and Abel School of Management</i>	15
Ms. Eli Dale	
<i>The Beheading of John the Baptist</i>	20
Rev. Julian Duckworth	
<i>Messy Church</i>	24
Rev. Sarah Buteux	
<i>Wrestling God</i>	28
Rev. Kevin K. Baxter	
<i>God's and Human Forgiving</i>	32
Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete	
<i>Mine Enemies</i>	36
Rev. Eric Hoffman	

Contributors To This Issue



The Rev. Dr. David Fekete is the pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Canada. He also serves as the National Youth Chaplain and is one of the Swedenborgian Church's delegates to the National Council of Churches, USA.



The Rev. Eric Hoffman is the general pastor of the Illinois Association. He has served as the pastor of the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul, Minnesota and the La Porte New Church in La Porte, Indiana.



The Rev. Dr. George Dole is Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies at the Swedenborgian House of Studies. He is also the pastor of the New Church of Bath, Maine.



The Rev. Sarah Buteux is an ordained Swedenborgian minister serving the First Congregational Church of Hadley, Massachusetts (UCC). She previously served as the pastor of the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem.



Ms. Leah G. Goodwin is the associate pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hanson, Massachusetts (ABC-USA) and co-editor of Our Daily Bread. She served as the Director of Parish Ministries at Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



The Rev. Kevin Baxter is the pastor of the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborg Chapel) in Massachusetts and co-editor of Our Daily Bread. He also serves as the Swedenborgian chaplain to the Harvard Chaplains.



The Rev. Julian Duckworth is the president of the New Church in Australia. He is also the minister of the Roseville New Church in Sydney.



Ms. Eli Dale delivered her sermon for this issue at the Elmwood New Church in Massachusetts in 2003.

SE P 2 THE TINDERBOX TONGUE

Ms. Leah Grace Goodwin

James 3:1-10

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

So also the tongue is a small body part, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

Sermon

I've always had a lot of respect for fire.

Some people might actually say that I'm sort of a chicken about it. Lighting even the sturdiest kitchen match makes me kind of nervous, and it's almost an exercise in futility to give me cardboard matches—I can barely bring myself to draw a spark from the flint strip on the matchbook.

The closest I ever came to playing with fire was at age six. In a moment that was radiant with poor judgment and morbid curiosity, I stuck a bobby pin in an electrical outlet. Sparks flew. I screamed. My grandfather came running and found me pressed against the laundry hamper, mouth hanging open, staring at a smoking and now nonfunctional outlet.

Since that formative, and thankfully nonfatal, incident, I just avoid the dangers involved with flame whenever possible. Don't get me wrong—a fire in the fireplace is one of the great pleasures of winter,

and there's nothing quite as beautiful as a wedding conducted by candlelight. And I love the smell of candles that have just been snuffed out—that and floor wax smell like church to me. I don't fear fire because it lacks beauty or benefit; I fear it because its beauty is so deadly. Perhaps no blessing of this physical world is as destructive as fire. We've seen that in the past few weeks, with the wildfires in Oklahoma and other states, with the mass shootings in Colorado and Wisconsin (guns use fire, too).

Most adults consider it the better part of wisdom not to toy with fire. Use it wisely, yes. Mess around with it, no. Ask any barbeque expert: he or she will tell you that the two most important rules of grilling are to respect the meat, and respect the fire.

Now, we humans have the power of speech, of communication. The vast majority of people on this planet master at least one language during their lifetime, the language of their birth. Many people master two or more. And because we exist in community, we use our power of speech constantly. We use it for an infinite variety of purposes and with a million different motives, noble and not so noble. We can turn our speaking to the best of ends or the worst; we can kindle love or inflame hate. (The closer we get to elections every year, the more clearly we hear that, from every political and social direction.) The words we choose and the intentions we bring to our speech make the difference between building the body of Christ—working toward the heavenly kingdom—or shrinking the possibilities of life down to the size of our own private hells.

And so, when we speak, we really do play with fire.

Our reading this morning pulls no punches about the pitfalls involved with speech. "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect." Hmph. It seems unlikely that any of us will achieve *that* particular standard. James wasn't particularly optimistic about the human capacity for communication in general. "The tongue is a fire," he wrote. "It is placed among our body parts as a world of iniquity." James isn't the only one. Many centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah made it clear that he wasn't terribly impressed with humans' ability to be communicated *with*. He said, "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may sustain the weary with a word" (Isaiah 50:4). Well, maybe so, but his students weren't particularly receptive to his

prophecies. I'm guessing anybody who's ever taught a classroom full of distracted students can relate.

So this passage from James is a little unnerving. On the face of it, he claims that the tongue is a purely sinful part of our bodies—that no good is likely to come of it. In verse 6, he says, "It stains the whole body;" it "sets on fire the cycle of nature" (meaning it destroys the course of our lives), it "is itself set on fire by hell." Worst of all, it is untamable.

Apparently, we have no way out of this mess. We are stuck with an unredeemable and renegade body part that has destructive power far out of proportion to its size. This is all the more obvious in our media-frenzied twenty-first century, because now we have not only TV, radio, and the telephone, but also Twitter, Facebook, email, FourSquare, Google+, and even Pinterest to work with, for good or for ill. I think, too, of the epidemic of in-person and now online bullying that's affected so many kids.

So what do we do? Where's the good news here?

James's comparison of the tongue to fire is apt, if pessimistic. Words, like fire, do have enormous power to hurt. But something in this passage hints to us that the tongue is not, in fact, as completely perverse as James appears to be saying it is. He claims that the tongue is "a restless evil, full of deadly poison," (verse 8) but he also says that the tongue is capable of "blessing the Lord and Father" (verse 9). The tongue can both curse and bless. So the tongue is "a world of iniquity," a *kosmos* of unrighteousness. Undoubtedly so—but if the tongue can bless as well as curse, then I believe we are to understand that speech's great power for destruction is matched by its power for the work of creation and redemption. Our speech can destroy, can do the devil's work, or it can do the work of grace. It can break down the body of the community, or it can build it up.

Throughout the Bible, fire is used to describe both good and bad things. There are the fires of Gehenna, of hell. There is the fire we read of in Revelation.

But there's also the fire we read about in Genesis 15, when God makes his covenant with Abram. And don't forget the pillar of fire that God used to lead the Israelites through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). Then there's that burning bush Moses chatted with. That was God himself!

Swedenborg tells us that fire, in scripture, represents two kinds of love: heavenly love, self-giving love, love of God and other people, Christ-like love; and selfish love, love of the self and of things before God and

other people. And then there's what we read in the Song of Solomon:

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm:
for love *is* strong as death;
Passion *is* fierce as the grave:
the coals thereof *are* coals of fire,
That have a most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
And neither can the floods drown it.

In the Christian tradition, we hear God's love being described in that passage—*love like unquenchable fire*.

Ah. Maybe there's some hope for our fiery, tinderbox tongues after all.

If we take all these kinds of mentions of fire in the Bible into account—if we think of fire as representing God's presence, as God's love, as God's passion for us and God's zeal for righteousness, the tongue isn't just a "restless evil." It can be that, yes, because we can choose to use what we say to hurt or to heal, to tear down or to build up, to embody the power of evil or imitate Christ. The tongue can destroy as effectively as it can give life. But we can use the power of speech to make all things new, to heal wounds and build bridges.

And that's just it: it is our choice. God sends us the raw material—love—and we have a hand in shaping its impact, both on our own souls and on this world. And how we choose to use words reveals the state of our hearts. Jesus said it: "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Frederick Buechner points out that the gift of speech is powerful evidence that humans bear a lot of responsibility in this world. "There was no light," he says, "until God called it into being by naming it. This is true for us, too—there is *no world* for us until we can name the world—and so words are, in a way, our godly sharing in the work of creation, and the speaking and writing of words is at once the most human and the most holy business we can engage in."¹ I see that wonder every day, in my work as an editor, helping people with that holy (and very, very human) business of self-expression. I see it, too, as my two small children play with and master language.

If speaking is, as Buechner claims, not only a sign of God's love for us, but also a continuing act of creating the world, then what we say matters even more. James may have discouraged his first-century readers from teaching, but it's as plainly true now as it was then that, in a larger sense, like it or not,

1 Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, 168.

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 3

we're all teachers. Our words have consequences. We are accountable for what we say. It's not because a vengeful God is waiting to judge us. It's because our words shape reality.

God gave us the gift of speech because we are in many ways the pinnacle of his creation. He entrusted the power of speech and higher thought to us so that we could help him in his work. So our words not only reveal the state of our own souls, they also *shape* our souls and the souls of those around us. Our capacity to speak, or to communicate in any form, is precious. It is a gift, a sign, a token of God's great love for and confidence in us. We have to figure out how to use that gift well. That means we have to pray, we have to care, we have to hope, we have to take courage when we speak.

Long before James wrote his letter, Isaiah called his people—and now us—to account for our words. "All you who are kindlers of fire, lighters of firebrands, walk in the flame of your fire!" He's telling us that words matter. *How* we communicate, *why* we communicate, shapes our common existence. The fire we kindle with our speech surrounds us all, whether to burn us up or to purify and warm us. If we choose our words lovingly—and truthfully (balancing those two is a whole other sermon), we can "speak in the tongues of angels." We can spark, not the ravaging flames of fear and selfishness and war, but rather the lifegiving fire of goodness, of compassion, of care. The flames of our fire will nourish rather than consume.

And we will find that, as Buechner puts it, "When words move us closer to that truth and gentleness of spirit by which we become fully human, the speaking of them is sacramental...[when we speak,] God's Word itself becomes flesh again and again and dwells among and within us, full of grace and truth." Amen.

Prayers

O God, who by your son Jesus Christ has set up on earth a kingdom of holiness to measure its strength against all others: make faith to prevail over fear, and righteousness over force, and truth over the lie, and love and concord over all things; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- from War Prayers, King's College, Cambridge (1940)

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

- Romans 8:26

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" *Gen 3:1-3*

The Most Ancient Church, which was a celestial man, was of such a character as not only to abstain from "eating of the tree of knowledge," that is, from learning what belongs to faith from sensuous things and memory-knowledges [*scientifica*], but was not even allowed to touch that tree, that is, to think of anything that is a matter of faith from sensuous things and memory-knowledges, lest they should sink down from celestial life into spiritual life, and so on downward.

Arcana Coelestia n. 202

Tuesday, September 4

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." *Gen 3:4&5*

Who have a stronger belief that their eyes are open, and that as God they know what is good and evil, than those who love themselves, and at the same time excel in worldly learning? And yet who are more blind? Only question them, and it will be seen that they do not even know, much less believe in, the existence of spirit; with the nature of spiritual and celestial life they are utterly unacquainted; they do not acknowledge an eternal life; for they believe themselves to be like the brutes which perish; neither do they acknowledge the Lord, but worship only themselves and nature.

Arcana Coelestia n. 206

Wednesday, September 5

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. *Gen 3:6*

Man's Own is all the evil and falsity that springs from the love of self and of the world, and from not believing in the Lord or the Word but in self, and from supposing that what cannot be apprehended sensuously and by means of memory-knowledge is nothing. *Arcana Coelestia n. 210*

Thursday, September 6

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. *Gen 3:7*

The case is the same with men who speak from themselves. And in the same way, whenever any persons have begun to reason concerning the things of spiritual and celestial life, or those of faith, I could perceive that they doubted, and even denied, for to reason concerning faith is to doubt and deny. And as it is all from self or their Own, they sink into mere falsities, consequently into an abyss of thick darkness, that is, of falsities, and when they are in this abyss the smallest objection prevails over a thousand truths, just as a minute particle of dust in contact with the pupil of the eye shuts out the universe and everything it contains. *Arcana Coelestia n. 215*

Friday, September 7

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. *Gen 3:8*

Mercy, peace, and every good, or the “faces of Jehovah” are the cause of the dictate with those who have perception, and also, although in a different manner, with those who have conscience, and they always operate mercifully, but are received according to the state in which the man is. *Arcana Coelestia n. 224*

Saturday, September 8

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” *Gen 3:9-12*

Of himself man cannot but do what is evil, and turn away from the Lord. Yet man does not do these things, but the evil spirits who are with him. Nor do these evil spirits do them, but the evil itself which they have made their own. Nevertheless, man does evil and turns himself away from the Lord, and is in fault; and yet he lives only from the Lord. *Arcana Coelestia n. 233.2*

THE CONFLICTED PATH TOWARD PEACE

Rev. Kim Hinrichs

9 SEP

Joel 3:9-11

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weakling say, “I am a warrior.” Come quickly, all you nations all around, gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord.

Luke 12:49-53

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Sermon

A couple of weeks ago, our family was on vacation in northern Wisconsin. It was beautiful and relaxing. We enjoyed the sun, went boating on the lake, roasted marshmallows, and enjoyed the pleasures of summer in North America. One evening, I sat out on a dock with my legs dangling over Lake Superior, and as I gazed at the expansive sky covering our earth, I became aware of a certain irony that I imagine many of us are feeling this summer. For as much as I appreciated the peaceful setting I found myself in, I was also aware that I was on an island—literally—in the midst of tremendous conflict in our world right now.

We encounter conflict everywhere—inside ourselves, in our relationships, in our places of work. In this presidential election season, our country is experiencing a heated political conflict. And then, too, there is more ominous conflict. We live with the continual threat of further terrorist attacks in our country. The war in Iraq continues, bringing anguish and fear and uncertainty to all sides. Many of us are anxious and afraid, and along with these feelings tends to come a perception that the world is spiraling downward into ever more destructive states.

Against this background comes our scripture reading for today. You might think that we would turn to Jesus in times of war and conflict for words of assurance and peace. But in this passage we find the exact opposite! “I have come to bring fire to the earth”? “I have not come to bring peace, but division”? Family members will be divided one against another? Is this the Jesus we know? What on earth could this passage mean?

First, let’s situate this passage in its context in the Gospel of Luke, and then let’s see what Swedenborg can tell us about it. Jesus’ words about division come during a speech to a crowd of thousands in which he delivers several warnings. These warnings are given against the backdrop of the common worldview of the time, which was that a savior would come to bring about the end of the present world and usher in a new one. The early Christians believed that Jesus *was* this long-awaited savior, and that the end of the world was imminent. Jesus’ words in his long series of warnings carry particular urgency because they were thought to apply to the last remaining days of the current world. When Jesus speaks of the division about to come, he is talking about the division between believers and nonbelievers that would be evident at the *eschatos*, or end of time. This end was coming so quickly, in fact, that there would be no time for painstaking reconciliation and consensus-building. Jesus brings division because he brings assurance of a new spiritual reality founded on love and compassion—a vision that some were ripe to accept and others rejected. Family members would be divided one against another as some adopted the new faith professed by Jesus and others did not.

On this level of meaning, Jesus seems to be saying that the time has come to make a decision about believing in God. A Swedenborgian reading of the passage can illuminate yet another layer of meaning.

Our conventional understanding of fire is sometimes associated with destruction, but in this instance, the “fire” that Jesus brings to the earth is associated with the warmth and light that corresponds to divine love and wisdom. So when Jesus says he has come to bring fire to the earth, we see that the Lord came into the world to bring divine love. What at first glance appears to be a destructive image is actually a redemptive one. Jesus doesn’t bring peace, because true peace cannot simply be delivered. God has given us free will, and that freedom requires that we struggle through conflict on our own in order to learn and grow into higher spiritual awareness.

The division that Jesus brings is spiritual combat, which is the only means by which we can arrive at peace. The division is the awareness between self-

centeredness and self-giving love, between seeing the way things are and knowing how they ought to be. This combat occurs on an internal level within each person and on an external level in our world, and it is a necessary part of growth. We all must go through it in order to reach toward peace. If peace were simply delivered to us on a platter, we would not understand it. Swedenborg said that after humanity goes through spiritual combat, internal spiritual truths are opened to us. In this way, the conflict is actually a vehicle for greater understanding—a vehicle for enlightenment.

I’d like to propose that the struggle and pain in which our world now finds itself is an opportunity for growth. I know this may be a hard idea to swallow given the enormous tragedy of September 11, all the events that led up to the war in Iraq, and the number of casualties that have occurred there since the war began. It’s hard to believe that the flooding in Bangladesh or the civil war in the Sudan or the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians could be signs of progress. But I believe that, time and again, human consciousness has evolved as a result of great conflict.

A survey of the last several hundred years of human history could show us many examples in which humanitarian efforts were strengthened by learning from tragic circumstances. Examples include the abolition of slavery, improved access around the world to clean drinking water and food supplies, the improvement of women’s status in most of the world’s countries, and our raised consciousness about our effect on the environment, along with our efforts to mitigate those effects.

Another clear example is the United Nations, which was formed in 1948 as a direct consequence of World War II. The UN represents what at one time was only a philosopher’s dream: that countries would set aside their own self-interest in order to form an international council whose purpose was to keep the peace for the greater good of the planet. Today, the UN has 191 member countries and operates throughout the world with the purpose of promoting respect for human rights, facilitating nonviolent conflict resolution, protecting the environment, fighting disease, reducing poverty, defining standards for safe air travel, improving telecommunications, fighting drug trafficking, combating terrorism, assisting refugees, setting up programs to clear landmines, helping to expand food production, and fighting the AIDS epidemic—to name just a few of its goals. All of these remarkable programs were set in motion because human beings went through terrible conflict. Through that conflict, they understood the imperative to change the world.

The divine is present in conflict in the power to transform. Some who experience great pain are able to turn it into goodness and unleash it into the world in a way that helps create a brand-new reality.

John and Bev Titus are members of our denomination. Their daughter Alicia died on September 11, 2001; she was a flight attendant on one of the planes that flew into the World Trade Center. In the aftermath of such a monumental loss, one might have understood if John and Bev had become filled with rage and a desire for vengeance. But their response was the opposite. They knew immediately that they never wanted anyone else to suffer as they had. Their experience taught them, in fact, that peace was even more important than they had ever known. They committed themselves to ending the cycle of hatred and violence that only brings more destruction. Through an organization called Peaceful Tomorrows, they have worked with thousands of others seeking a peaceful resolution to the war in Iraq, and many other world conflicts as well.

John and Bev have moved me immensely over the past years, because they have been agents of transformation. With open, anguished hearts, they have let grief tear through them, and at the same time they have turned that energy into goodness for the world.

John has written an essay containing some of his reflections. Here are a few of his words: "Somehow, through it all, I have been given many gifts, including the gift of heartfelt compassion and the blessing of forgiveness. I realized immediately after Alicia's death that I must learn to forgive those responsible, or the anger would consume me like a cancer. Forgiveness is a gift that one gives himself and in no way implies sanction of the other's action. Forgiveness is a letting go of those feelings that long to consume you with a twisted grief filled with hate and revenge. I could not allow that to happen! That is not who I am, and it would not bring my Alicia back. It would only destroy me in the end.

"Throughout my journey of grief, true compassion has come into my heart with a longing for expression. Through compassion I have a renewed sense of purpose toward peace; a peace that recognizes the oneness of life and is beyond the false sense of peace attained by the mere absence of war. Working for peace and justice in a world that seems so inept at both has given new meaning to my life. For this is what my dear, sweet Alicia was all about, and this is what the Divine would have for us."

Would we say that John has arrived at that desirable state of being we call peace? It is certainly not the

kind of peace that is calm and happy. But amazingly, he seems to have found a kind of peace that results from working to make the world a better place. It is an active peace, wizened and scarred and probably screaming. It is the divine at work. John's actions, and the actions of thousands of others like him, witness to the hand of God that is bringing about divine providence. We are meant to live in peace—even if the path leading to it is full of struggle, even if peace and conflict go hand-in-hand each step of the way.

It's hard to discern what good has come into the world since September 11, 2001. We don't know yet how our common history will be written and how these present events will influence our future. And yet I am convinced that the present circumstances of our world offer us many opportunities to contribute to a growth in human consciousness.

Swedenborg believed that humanity was evolving into ever more enlightened states of being. He believed that our world was in the midst of the long and painstaking process of removing all of those things that separate us from God—that the world was gradually turning into one that reflects the goodness and truth from which it is made. It's a process that naturally involves conflict.

The Baha'i religion shares this view of our future. Its adherents suggest that the issue is how much pain can be experienced by humanity "before we wholeheartedly accept the spiritual nature that makes us a single people, and gather the courage to plan our future in the light of what has been so painfully learned. Whether in the life of the individual or that of society, profound change occurs more often than not in response to intense suffering and to unendurable difficulties that can be overcome in no other way. Just so great a testing experience [...] is needed to weld the earth's diverse peoples into a single people."

After thinking about all of this, perhaps we are not so surprised after all by Jesus' statement that he brings fire and division to the earth. Perhaps we can see that when we talk about peace, the issue is really not so much how to eradicate conflict, but how to welcome it in wise and loving ways, and how to learn from it as part of our evolution.

For this is what faith comes down to, after all: the belief that we are on the path of divine providence. My hope is that we will not be discouraged by the darkness that surrounds us, but that we will remember to take the long view, to have hope in our evolving spiritual destiny, and to remember our own roles in its unfolding. Amen.

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 10

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

Gen 25:21-22

As regards man, the case is that when he is being regenerated, good is insinuated by the Lord into his rational (that is, good will to the neighbor), to which will or good is adjoined truth from the natural man; but when this has been done, the natural is not yet regenerate, as may be known from the fact that the internal or rational man often fights with the external or natural man; and so long as there is combat the natural is not regenerate; and when this is not regenerate, the rational is barren as to truth. *Arcana Coelestia n. 3286.2*

Tuesday, September 11

And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." *Gen 25:23*

As regards this good which is here treated of, it is twofold, interior and exterior; the interior good communicates with the interior man, that is, with the rational; while the exterior good communicates with the external man, that is, with the things of the body, and makes the life in the external senses, and also in the actions. *Arcana Coelestia n. 3293.2*

Wednesday, September 12

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. *Gen 25:24-26*

As regards truth adhering with some power to the lowest good of the natural, the case is this: The natural, or the natural man, when being regenerated, has its conception as to good and truth from the rational, or through the rational from the spiritual; through this from the celestial; and through this from the Divine.

Arcana Coelestia n. 3304.2

Thursday, September 13

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. *Gen 25:27-28*

The case with good and truth is the same as with offspring, in that they are conceived, are in the womb, are born, grow up, and also advance in age even to the last. That they are conceived, are in the womb, and are born, pertains to the state of origin; but that they grow up, and advance in age even to the last, pertains to the state of progress. The state of progress advances in succession from the birth, and is a state of the conjunction of good and truth. *Arcana Coelestia n. 3308*

Friday, September 14

Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." *Gen 25:29-31*

It is good and truth that constitute the rational, and it is also good and truth that constitute the natural; the good of the rational flows in without truth—thus immediately—into the good of the natural; and also through truth, thus mediately; whereas the good of the rational flows in through the truth of the rational into the truth of the natural, thus mediately; and also through the good of the natural into the truth there, thus also immediately. *Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3314b*

Saturday, September 15

Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. *Gen 25:32-34*

When man draws a conclusion from natural perception, he believes that faith, insofar as it is truth of doctrine, is prior to charity insofar as this is good of life, because he perceives how the truth of doctrine enters, but not how the good of life; for the former enters by an external, that is, a sensuous way, while the latter enters by an internal way.

Arcana Coelestia n. 3324

TIME WILL TELL

Rev. Dr. George F. Dole

Isaiah 20

In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it—at that time the Lord had spoken to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, “Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet,” and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the Lord said, “Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. And they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast. In that day the inhabitants of this coastland will say, ‘See, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?’”

Mark 11:1-11

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

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

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

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

Revelation Unveiled 918

“And I did not see a temple in it because the Lord God almighty is its temple, and the Lamb” means that in that church there will be nothing on the surface that is separated from what is within because the only Lord himself, in his divine-human nature, who is the source of everything that makes the church, will be approached, worshiped, and revered.

“I did not see a temple in it” does not mean that there will be no temples in the new church that is the new Jerusalem, but that there will be nothing on the surface that is separated from what is within. This is because “a temple” means the church with a focus on its worship and in the highest sense the Lord himself in his divine-human nature as the one who is to be worshiped. Further, since everything in the church comes from the Lord, it says that the Lord God almighty is its temple, and the Lamb, meaning the Lord in his divine-human nature. “The Lord God almighty” means the Lord from eternity who is Jehovah himself.

Sermon

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

If we read all four gospels, it is hard to combine their accounts of Holy Week into one coherent story. They agree concerning the basic sequence of triumphal entry, last supper, betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection, but they differ considerably in detail. It is striking, for example, that Mark and John make no mention of the cleansing of the temple, which has such a prominent place in Matthew and Luke.

Part of the difficulty, though, is surely due to some of our own assumptions. I suspect that most of us have a picture of Jesus constantly followed by all twelve disciples, which is not all that likely. Did all of them go with him into the temple? We are not told that they did. However, what we are told is no more than bits and pieces from what must have been a very full day, with crowds of people milling around and buttonholing the disciples, for example. Was the triumphal entry in the morning? If so, where did they have lunch? We are told of some teaching that Jesus did, perhaps enough to account for about half an hour of that day, but not much more than that. Just imagine

16

 S E P

being commissioned to do a movie of that day and being told that it had to be at least ten hours long.

Let us focus for a bit on this matter of the scene in the temple, then. The picture of Jesus overturning tables and lashing out with a scourge of cords is a dramatic one, but we need to see it in its proper context. This was a time when people knew that prophets were people taken over by the spirit, and the spirit could lead a prophet to do some quite unorthodox things. Hosea married a prostitute (Hosea 1:1). Jeremiah wore a loincloth for a while, hid it in a cleft in some rocks, and found it beyond repair when he unearthed it (Jeremiah 13:1-11). He shattered a potter's vessel as a symbol of what was going to happen to Judah (Jeremiah 19) and wore a yoke for the same purpose (Jeremiah 27-28). Ezekiel took a brick and used it as a model of a city under siege, then lay on his left side for three hundred and ninety days and on his right side for forty days to symbolize the years of exile (Ezekiel 4). He shaved his head and beard with a sword, burned some of the hair, and scattered some to the wind (Ezekiel 5). Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years as a prophecy of what lay ahead for Judah (Isaiah 20). In a way, when Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers, he simply presented his credentials as a prophet. Everyone knew that prophets and their prophecies were enigmatic.

If all this sounds confusing, that is probably appropriate. After the entry and the temple scene, rumors would have been flying, and we can be fairly sure that they would have been no more accurate than the rumors of our own times. Jesus did not help matters with his follow-up, either. He did not gather the core conspirators together to plan a campaign, or commission them to enlist the troops. He did not mount a soapbox and urge some plan of action. He just went quietly back to Bethany for a good night's sleep, letting the turmoil take its own course.

That turmoil centered on a central tension in Judean popular opinion: the tension between the dream of restoration and the fact of Roman power. This is the age-old tension between the ivory tower and the boots on the ground, between theory and practice. The theory was proclaimed by the prophets in the dream of the return of the age of Israelite glory, the kingship of David. The boots on the ground were the boots of the soldiers of the greatest empire the world had ever known. The theory could point to the fact that the tiny kingdom of Israel had outlasted the empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and Greece—quite a list. The boots on the ground just said, "That was then. This is now."

We need ideals. We need down-to-earth experience. They will usually be at variance with each other, and they need to be in dialogue with each other for the simple reason that neither perspective sees the whole picture. Karl Marx spun a theory of class struggle that inspired thousands and led to immense changes, that overthrew a deeply entrenched, unjust, and seemingly omnipotent tyranny. The result, though, was far from the worker's paradise that the theory foretold. More recently, *perestroika* promised a new era of freedom to the shambles left by the collapse of Marx's dream, and once again, the promise has not been realized. The list of reforms and revolutions that have fallen short could go on and on.

The same story can be found on the individual level, as well. We have our personal dreams, whether of worldly success, of true love, or simply of security. We need those dreams, and we do what we think is needed to make them come true. Both personal experience and current research, though, show quite clearly that we are not very good judges of what will work. We have more than our parents had, much more than our grandparents had, but our happiness does not seem to have followed suit. We reach midlife, and things are not as they should be. Is something wrong with our dream?

Not necessarily. We might think of the story of the three little pigs. There was nothing wrong with their dream of security, of building a wolf-proof house. It was quick and easy to build a house out of straw, but straw was far too flimsy to bear the burden of the dream, and the first little pig found that out the hard way. The second little pig learned from the failure of the first. Sticks were stronger. They were not strong enough, though, as the second little pig learned. The third little pig learned from the failures of the first two and found the means that the dream actually required, which he would not have done had he not kept the dream alive.

All too often, though, we fail to follow this script. The story we tell has the second little pig look at what happened to the first and say to himself, "He didn't use enough straw," and the third little pig say, "That second pig didn't get the message. He *still* didn't use enough straw." We keep using more of the means that have failed, not realizing that the problem is not one of quantity but of quality. What is needed is not more of the same but something that is not the same.

We are closer to our Palm Sunday message than it might seem. The Lord came to show us how to live in peace and prosperity. That was the essence of the promises of the prophets. Think of that as

the wolf-proof house. Think of the first little pig as trying to build it out of money. That does not work. It is vulnerable to the wolf of greed and envy, and the more we focus on it, the more greed and envy it breeds. Think of the second little pig as trying to build it out of military supremacy. That does not work. It breeds fear and makes enemies, and the more we focus on it, the more enemies we have. Think of the third little pig as actually learning the lessons implicit in those failures and building his house out of mutual affection and understanding—not the kingdom of Israel, but the kingdom of heaven.

Put that way, it is absurdly obvious. It is hard to understand why we keep trying to build with straw and sticks, time after time after time, century after century. In the words of a hymn, “Age after age, their tragic empires rise.” It would be more accurate, though, to say that it is hard for *us* to understand when the message itself is so simple; and until we find out why it is so hard for us, we remain benighted.

One major cause of the difficulty is simply materialism. In its extreme, theoretical form, materialism holds that only physical matter is real, but this is an ivory-tower concept that fails abysmally at the boots-on-the-ground level. We cannot help but live as though qualities such as honesty and dishonesty, kindness and cruelty, hope and despair, are real. In fact, by its own standards, “materialism” itself does not exist. It cannot be weighed or measured. One of the most radical materialists of the modern era was Ayn Rand, and it is telling that her most widely read works were the novels *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*—not examinations of actual events but works of fiction—and that one of her expository books was entitled *The Virtue of Selfishness*. If only matter is real, then obviously we need to keep getting more of it.

At the level of everyday living, then, it is doubtful that anyone is a complete and consistent materialist. However, the material world is the only one our physical senses tell us about, and their voice tends to drown out all others. So we keep trying to build our houses out of money and power. The good people of Judea, therefore, dreamed of a Davidic king and the overthrow of the Roman Empire.

That dream had deep roots. By Gospel times, the reign of David was roughly a thousand years in the past. What kind of failure would it take to quiet the clamor of “the kingdom of Israel” so that the voice of “the kingdom of heaven” could be heard? What Jesus did on Palm Sunday was to embody all those

materialistic hopes so that they could be plainly seen, and carry them to the cross.

The basic message is absurdly simple. Jesus presented it to Pilate in a single sentence: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). That’s not a difficult message to understand intellectually, but it took the pain of the crucifixion to convey the full seriousness of this message, to carry it from the head to the heart.

Watching the television ads by investment firms focusing attention on the creation and management of wealth, you have to wonder whether this presumably Christian nation has noticed the Lord’s commandment not to lay up treasures on earth. Those treasures, he said, are perishable. The treasures of heaven, the treasures of mutual affection and understanding, cannot be gained rapidly. Like the house of bricks, they take time; but they last—forever. Amen.

Prayer

Grant to us, O Lord, fullness of faith, firmness of hope, and fervency of love. For the sake of the gospel, may we sit loosely to our wealth and daily embrace you in the poor of the world. As we rejoice in your generosity, so may we give ourselves in the service of others, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ODB Online Sign-up

The vast majority of *Our Daily Bread’s* funding comes from the Swedenborgian Church. In these troubled economic times, we are all forced to make budget cuts and live within our means. We would love to send a paper version of ODB to everyone who would like it, but we are not able to do that. If you wish to receive the magazine in print, it is essential that you subscribe!

But please do not forget that you can download ODB on your computer and print it on your printer. The electronic delivery is free, and it is also more reliable than the USPS, which delivers it when it fits into their schedule (the magazine is not sent first class).

Step One: Go to www.swedenborg.org

Step Two: Click on the sign-up icon for “Messenger and ODB” (you can sign up for just ODB if you prefer).

Step Three: Enter your email address.

Step Four: Select “*Our Daily Bread*” & fill in the required information.

Daily Meditations

Monday, September 17

He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. *Gen 37:9-11*

The Divine which comes from the Lord is in the supreme sense the Divine in Him; but in the relative sense is the Divine from Him. The Divine good from Him is what is called celestial, and the Divine truth from Him is what is called spiritual. When the rational receives these, the good and the truth of the rational are what are signified; but when the natural receives them, the good and truth of the natural are what are signified. *Arcana Coelestia n. 4696*

Tuesday, September 18

They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." *Gen 37:18-20*

For love is the very being of man, and hence is his living; and it forms man according to an image of itself, just as the soul of man, which is his interior essence, as it were creates or fashions the body into an image, of itself; and indeed in such a way that by means of the body it acts and has sensation just as it wills and thinks. *Arcana Coelestia n. 4727.2*

Wednesday, September 19

But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. *Gen 37:21-22*

The Lord's Human, after it was glorified or made Divine, cannot be thought of as human, but as the Divine love in human form; and this so much the more than the angels, who, when they appear, appear as forms of love and charity under the human shape, and

this from the Lord; for the Lord from Divine love made His Human Divine; just as man through heavenly love becomes an angel after death, so that he appears, as just said, as a form of love and charity under the human shape. *Arcana Coelestia n. 4735.2*

Thursday, September 20

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. *Gen 37:23-24*

As faith alone and the confidence from it appear of this character to everyone who thinks seriously about it, especially to the good, therefore such persons labor to dispel and annihilate even these appearances, by thus paring off whatever touches them more nearly, and whatever is round about this Divine truth.

Arcana Coelestia n. 4741.2

Friday, September 21

Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?" *Gen 37:25 & 26*

The goods of love are in general two: the good of celestial love, and the good of spiritual love. Diametrically opposed to the good of celestial love, is the evil of the love of self; and diametrically opposed to the good of spiritual love, is the evil of the love of the world. *Arcana Coelestia n. 4750.3*

Saturday, September 22

"Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

Gen 37:27-28

Those who are in simple good acknowledge that the Lord's Human is Divine, and also that in order for man to be saved the works of charity ought to be done.

Arcana Coelestia n. 4754

THE CAIN AND ABEL SCHOOL OF MANAGMENT

Ms. Eli Dale

Genesis 4:1-16

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Mark 2:1-12

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to

him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Sermon

Conflict is a bad thing. A very bad thing. A thing to be avoided. Everybody who likes conflict, put your hands up.

In churches, we might think that conflict is especially bad. Christians are supposed to be loving and meek. Christians should get along bonded by a common doctrine. When people don't agree, it creates conflict, which is inevitably hurtful and destructive. So we will avoid, compromise, and accommodate, often totally losing track of our basic purpose and values, to wiggle out of a situation we assume will surely lead to bloodletting.

Did you notice my hand was up when I asked about liking conflict? Well, I don't really *like* conflict, but I surely do appreciate it. I think conflict gets a bad rap.

First, I don't think most people have really formed a clear working definition of conflict. I even question some experts' definitions of conflict. The folks at XiCom, who do conflict management training, say conflict occurs when "your concerns or desires differ from another person's." I disagree. If your desire is to vacation in Cincinnati and my desire is to vacation at Moosehead Lake, that does not create a conflict. This definition lacks context. The only way our vacation desires will conflict is if we plan on going on vacation *together*. If we have one week we want to spend together and you say, "Let's go to New Orleans for

Mardi Gras” and I say, “Let’s stay home and paint the garage,” *then* we have a conflict.

I often use the definition “conflict occurs when there are excess demands on a seemingly limited resource.” Our vacation time is a limited resource, and we cannot meet both our demands by simultaneously staying home and going away. But that definition still isn’t right, because sometimes we have conflict over ideas without a clear resource at risk.

I like Hugh Halverstadt’s definition, “Conflicts are problems to be solved, not contests to be won.” When we solve a problem together, we both “get on the same side of the table.” Solving a problem, we’re likely to sit side-by-side and focus our attention on the problem. A contest to be won pits us against each other; we focus on getting our way at the expense of the other. But I’m not sure we can say that Cain failed to recognize the problem that needed to be solved. His view of the problem was that God didn’t like him. That’s a difficult problem to solve.

Buddha perhaps gives us the best understanding when he says, “All suffering is the result of attachment.” Attachment is not necessarily bad. Attachment to justice causes suffering in an unjust world. But I truly believe that attachment is one of the things that contributes to conflict—perhaps the major thing.

As human beings—social beings—we cannot escape conflict. So let’s learn about it.

Let’s look at the conflicts in our Scripture readings today. There are three: Cain’s conflict with God, which he transfers to Abel; the paralytic’s conflict with his disability; and the scribes’ conflict with Jesus.

Cain (whose name means “to possess” or “to acquire”) has acquired certain needs and expectations. He has become attached to how he thinks the world should be. He brings the Lord a gift and expects positive regard in response. He gets no regard whatsoever. Not only that, but his crummy little brother (whose name means “vaporous”) *does* get the attention. Cain experiences friction between his envisioned reality and experienced reality. Cain interprets God’s notice of Abel’s offering and God’s non-notice of his own offering, and his interpretation leads him to get angry. The Lord (or Cain’s conscience) intervenes and reframes the situation, but thanks to Cain’s state of mind, he doesn’t hear what God says to him, instead projecting his own interpretation onto the situation. Now Cain has a real problem: with God. It’s difficult to get even with God. So he relocates his pain from God to Abel, placing the blame for his bad

feelings on God’s apparently preferential treatment of Abel and avoiding the opportunity to do any inner work of his own. He takes action, spilling Abel’s blood onto the very ground from which Cain derives his livelihood and from which he drew his offerings to God. He gets in trouble for doing this. Then he becomes afraid that the very solution he applied to Abel will be applied to him—that someone will surely kill him. God allows him to live, but banishes him from the ground, thereby causing Cain to lose his identity. This conflict has what is termed a “lose/lose outcome.” There are no winners.

In the Gospel story, we have a man whose body is in conflict with a disability. Knowing that the man is given his physical health by means of forgiveness of sins, we can assess his conflict to be a spiritual one. He has some error of inner orientation; he is out of step with God’s will; he is somehow resisting love. But luckily, the man has friends. They have a vision. They put their vision into action. (Imagine wanting to see the local guru so badly that you would damage his house to get in! I hope Jesus could heal ceilings as well as people.)

This poor paralyzed man floats down from the ceiling. Jesus has a vision, too. He doesn’t mess around with surface matters, with presenting symptoms. He goes right to the *cause* of the problem and says, “Your sins are forgiven.” Problem solved!

But a new problem arises! Jesus is violating protocol. He is displaying an excess of personal power. He is out of scale. The scribes (visiting in his house!) challenge Jesus on the basis of rules, and then they challenge his very person. “*What* you do is bad” leads to “*Who* you are is bad.”

Jesus responds in what may be a playful move: he switches back and addresses the *symptoms*. He is willing to change from “your sins are forgiven” (the root of the matter) to “pick up your mat and walk” (the surface issue). The man picks up his mat and walks, amazing the bystanders and annoying the scribes. Jesus is upsetting the system. The result of this annoyance is friction with those who attach their needs and expectations to that system. The scribes have something to lose here. The penultimate result of this annoyance is crucifixion, because sometimes you have to do the right thing regardless of the conflict it causes. (The ultimate result, of course, is resurrection.)

What do we learn from these stories about what can create conflict?

Expectations play a leading role—more specifically, attachment to those expectations. Cain expected God to meet his need to be noticed by noticing that Cain had brought an offering to God. What God ended up noticing was Cain's anger and fallen face. The scribes had expectations about the limited role of a messiah and about where forgiveness comes from. They might also have been afraid: afraid of change, of losing status. Face it: people do not like their boats rocked.

Conflict often arises from actions that don't yield the expected results. Frustration, disillusionment, bewilderment, the need to go back to the drawing board, the feeling of having wasted time and effort, and perhaps even a lost "now what?" feeling can drag our fingers into a fist.

The need for acceptance also plays a big role. Again, Cain longed for acceptance and was so deeply hurt when he was not accepted that it harmed his character. The paralytic wanted to be rejoined with society. We all long for a place in another's heart, whether God's or the community's. Conflict does not occur alone. Our lives, and both the joys and conflicts they bring, are relational.

Communication is a huge factor in conflict. To me, it is a wonder that people ever communicate at all. When we try to connect through words, there is what we mean to say, what we actually say, what is heard, and what is understood. The meaning we intend can be missed, twisted, or substituted at many steps between one brain and another. God may have said lovingly, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" But apparently Cain heard a scolding instead: "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

I learned a long time ago that, no matter how much I might be convinced that the person who misunderstood me was in the wrong, the most constructive thing I could do was say, "I'm sorry, I guess I didn't make myself clear." No point adding an argument about what I did or didn't say on top of a mixed-up communication.

Also in the category of communication is what is *not* said. We are not told that Cain ever told God what he wanted; he just gets mad when he doesn't get it. My husband, Norris Dale, has a saying he calls Dale's Law: "If you don't say you want it, you probably won't get it." With his brother, Cain exhibits an aggressive silence, an intentional non-communication. In some translations, we read, "Cain said to Abel, 'Let us go to the field.'" These translators insist on putting words in Cain's mouth. The Hebrew actually says, "Cain

spoke to Abel." That's all. Cain seems so disdainful of his brother that even when he speaks to him, he doesn't say anything.

Interpretation is a major player in the conflict game. Cain has decided exactly what happened: God picked Abel and not him. God is unfair. God's regard is a limited resource, and Abel got Cain's share. Cain is not able to stop and look within and ask, "How else might I understand this?" So his conflict with—his attack on—Abel enacts his limited thinking. That happens in real life a lot.

Many other factors influence these elements and direct the nature and intensity of conflict: how secure or insecure one feels, how mature one is, the genders of the antagonists. And a little factor called "systemic homeostasis," which means "we *are* stuck in a rut (and we mean to stay here)."

There are no guarantees for avoiding the negative aspects of conflict, but there are some tools for getting the best out of conflict. (Remember, conflict is a problem to be solved, not a contest to be won.)

Rules can be helpful, provided they are not made into idols. Last Christmas, we were with friends, and we got out the Parcheesi board. It had been years since any of us had played Parcheesi, so we started reading the rules. There were a lot of rules. We got very bored about halfway through and said, "Oh, let's just play." Well, of course, one person or another would remember some rule from their childhood and try to invoke it while we were playing. We'd stop the game and go back to read the rules from the box lid. Sometimes we would agree to use different rules, but at least we knew what was written and what we were changing. It meant we could play together instead of fight together.

There are written and unwritten rules. I vote in favor of written rules. You can always change them if they don't work, but having some unemotional piece of paper reminding us of the agreements we made about how to go about living together is a real boon.

There are God's rules and our rules. It helps to play by God's rules. God wants the best for us and provides rules to aim us in that direction. *Our* rules can be a mixed blessing. The scribes, unfortunately, over-identified with the rules. Rules became idols. Cain was unrestrained by codified rules in the literal story. In the inner meaning of the passage, however, he is nothing but rules. Cain represents a doctrine that separates faith from charity. Abel is worship from charity itself. It is the tendency to declare the "truth" without ever acting in lovingkindness that murders

charity. Either way, literal or correspondent, Cain's relationship with rules was undermining his ability to live. If we make up our rules by the light of God's rules, when we make lovingkindness the first thing, then our rules will come alive because they support God's intention.

Lowering the fear level makes a big difference in dealing positively with conflict. When we read Mark's gospel, there is an urgency that adds anxiety to the story of Jesus, headed inevitably for the cross. Mark uses the word "immediately" over and over again, like a train speeding down the track. He makes us want to yell, "Wait, stop, slow down; I know who Jesus is—don't kill him!" That's excellent for storytelling. It's terrible for conflict resolution. Cain was *afraid* that God didn't love him. Fear and anxiety will undercut even a skilled mediator's best efforts to enlighten a tense situation. Stop. Breathe. Wait. Think. Fear not.

Yes, Cain killed Abel and yes, the Romans and the temple government killed Jesus (for a couple of days). Notwithstanding these unsatisfactory outcomes, I want to propose today that conflict can actually be a good thing. It can heighten creativity, open understanding, intensify love. Solving problems

together can be challenging and fun, in a way that winning contests can't. In problem solving, it is possible to create a win/win solution; but in contest winning there are, perforce, losers.

Indeed, conflict, spiritual conflict, is the very meat of regeneration. By divine design, it is how we grow. Met with vision, run by rules based on sound theological principles, infused with lovingkindness, conflict can result in an outcome in which *everyone* can take up their mats and walk—or dance. Blessed be the Lord.

Prayer

Lord, help us to see in the groaning of creation not death throes but birth pangs;

Help us to see in suffering a promise for the future, because it is a cry against the inhumanity of the present.

Help us to glimpse in protest the dawn of justice;

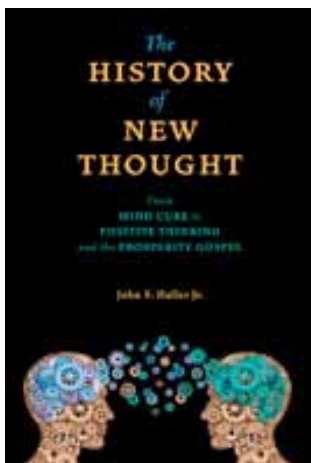
In the cross, the pathway to resurrection;

And in suffering, the seeds of joy.

- Ruben Alves, 1987

New Book (November 2012)

***The History of New Thought:
From Mind Cure to Positive Thinking and the Prosperity Gospel***
Author: John S. Haller Jr.
ISBN: 978-0-87785-348-0



Description:

Composed of healers, priests, psychologists, and ordinary people from all levels of society, the proponents of New Thought have one thing in common: a belief in the power of the mind. In *The History of New Thought*, Haller examines the very beginnings of the movement, its early influences (including Swedish seer Emanuel Swedenborg), and how its initial emphasis on healing disease morphed into a vision of the mind's ability to bring us whatever we desire.

While most histories of New Thought tend to focus on formal church organizations, Haller reveals the much broader impact that New Thought has had on American culture. Bestselling authors from the late nineteenth century and onward sold books in the millions of copies that were eagerly read and quoted by powerful politicians and wealthy industrialists. The idea that thoughts could become reality is so embedded in American culture that we tell each other to "be positive" without ever questioning why. New Thought has become our thought.

Anyone interested in psychology, popular culture, or history will be fascinated by this exploration of a little-known facet of modern culture.

Available from the Swedenborg Foundation: www.swedeborg.com

Monday, September 24

“Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.’” I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” And they did so.

Exodus 14:3-4

By the Lord’s coming into the world and assuming the Human and making it Divine, He cast all falsities and evils into hell, and reduced truths and goods in the heavens into order, and liberated from damnation those who were of the spiritual church.

Arcana Coelestia n. 8137.3

Tuesday, September 25

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed towards the people, and they said, “What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?” So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him. *Exodus 14:5-6*

By “the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants being turned against the people,” is signified a change of state into evil in the case of all those who are in falsities from evil, against those who are of the spiritual church.

Arcana Coelestia n. 8143

Wednesday, September 26

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

The subject treated of is the first temptation of those who are of the spiritual church, and the conducting of them through the midst of hell, and their protection then by the Lord; and also the immersion of those who were in faith separate from charity in hell, where are falsities from evils. They who are of the spiritual church are represented by the sons of Israel; they who are in faith separate from charity by the Egyptians.

Arcana Coelestia n. 8125

Thursday, September 27

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?” *Exodus 14:10-11*

“Fear” denotes a horrible dread, because when temptation assails, the conscience, thus the internal man (for conscience is of the internal man), is disheartened by reason of falsities and evils; whence comes horror, which is aversion conjoined with the fear of spiritual death. *Arcana Coelestia n. 8162*

Friday, September 28

But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

Exodus 14:13-14

He who when he is tempted believes that he can resist from his own strength, yields; the reason is that he is in what is false, and that he therefore attributes merit to himself, and thus demands to be saved of himself, and thus shuts out the influx from the Divine.

Arcana Coelestia n. 8172

Saturday, September 29

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh.” *Exodus 14:15-18*

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

Arcana Coelestia n. 8179.2

SE P 30 THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Rev. Julian Duckworth

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Arcana Coelestia 3542

When we understand some true idea but we don't will it at the same time, it is not a truth for us, no matter how much it seems to be. If our will is bent on doing harm, good and truth stand far apart. But if our will is for some good, however unclear that seems, they are not separate but linked together, even though the order in which they stand is reversed, with truth

leading good rather than good leading truth; because that is the way in which we begin to be regenerated.

The reason why "the neck" means "what joins together" is that higher things that belong to the head communicate with lower things that belong to the body by means of the neck. So, influx and communication, and therefore union, are meant by what is in between. This will be seen far more clearly when we look at the correspondences of heaven with the various parts of the human body. And because "the neck" has this meaning of connection and union, the phrase "bands around the neck" therefore means the cutting off and therefore the destruction of truth, which happens when spiritual things that are continually flowing in from the Lord are no longer allowed to pass into the rational part of a person's mind, nor, as a consequence, into the natural part of their life.

Sermon

And Herod sent an executioner and commanded that his head should be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. (Mark 6:27-28)

I'm going to take us into what must be one of the oddest parts of the gospels: the story of John the Baptist being beheaded. There it is, in all its grisly detail. You could be forgiven for asking, "What's that got to do with anything?" It's like when a radio cricket commentator suddenly starts talking, during a boring five minutes, about a new shin-pad design, and you think, "Oh, come on, get on with the match! I'm not here for that." But just as shin pads *do* have quite a lot to do with cricket—at least, far more than the blueberry muffins the commentator was talking about earlier—so this beheading of John the Baptist has a great deal to do with the overall flow of the gospel story, which of course is not about John but about Jesus Christ. Nothing, absolutely nothing, in the gospels is a side issue or a bit of padding to fill out the chapter!

When we look at anything in the gospels, we are looking at the growth and development of love—the Lord's love for us and our love for the Lord—and what we do as a result of that love. That's what it's all about. It's a union. It's a meeting up. It's ultimately a relationship we have.

But it's also a process. We do not (usually) read something in the gospels and feel that we are going to definitely start following the Lord, loving the Lord, from now on. We don't make that kind of decision. If anything, it's the Lord who makes that decision on

our behalf, perhaps seeing that we are ready for a new awakening. So the Lord moves us up and onto a level of feeling that just wasn't there before.

What normally happens is that we are aware of, say, half a dozen general spiritual ideas that we have grown up with or come across. Those ideas sit inside our heads, and we can think about them, turn them over, take one and look at it, put it back again, and feel that we have some kind of helpful belief base. But up to this point, we don't really *feel* them. We know them, we have them. "There is a God. There's heaven (and there's hell). God runs everything. God gives us the Bible. I am meant to be good and do some good. I have a part of me which isn't very good." And so on. Which one shall I take out and look at, or maybe use in some way?

That level is very much like John the Baptist. If you know the gospels fairly well, you'll know that John comes before Jesus, baptizes people (and if that isn't an introduction, what is?), and says, "One comes after me who is greater than I"—that's Jesus—"and I must decrease, and He will increase." And, about halfway through the gospel, John gets beheaded and is never mentioned again, because from now on it's all about Jesus.

If I can run that sequence a bit more abstractly, you first have truth—which is really all about love or good, almost like a signpost for it—but when the love or good comes into its own because of what the truth did, then the truth isn't so important now, and it can move to the sidelines. John can give way to Jesus. Thinking about something gives way to being and doing it.

Except for one thing. John the Baptist doesn't do his bit and then take a long service leave. He gets beheaded. Decapitated. "Off with his head!"

And suddenly—and this is why it seems so odd to us—you are in the middle of the biggest political intrigue possible. Herod is the king. Well, actually, Herod is the puppet-king installed by the Romans to keep everyone quiet. There he is when the wise men ask, "Where is he who is born king of the Jews?"

"Eh, what's that, king of the Jews? I am king of the Jews!" And he massacres all the Israelite baby boys under age two to make sure of his position. Later, he throws John into prison.

Do you remember hearing recently a report that they are pretty sure they've found the actual tomb of Herod? Herod really existed. He's historical. A first-century historian called Josephus writes all about it.

One of the important things about the gospels is that they are set in the context of actual history. These things happened. They're verifiable. Here's the first verse of Luke chapter 3: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being Tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip being Tetrarch of Iturea, and Lysanias Tetrarch of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John (the Baptist) in the wilderness."

Whoa, that's history! And don't ever think otherwise.

But the relevance for us isn't the history, of course (that just tells us it's for real). The relevance is that, as well as this interplay of John (truth) giving way to Jesus (love), there's the third ingredient, which is our ego, our natural resistance to any change. "Where is he who is born king of the Jews?" "What's that? *I'm* king of the Jews." We all have our Herod, who's installed to "keep the peace"—and to keep it at all costs.

So Herod, hearing things about Jesus, thinks Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead ("Didn't I get rid of him?"). Then the narrative rewinds into this amazing political-intrigue tale of how Herod's family (our egos are so complex!) arranged John's demise. That would suit Herod, because John knew that Herod had committed adultery with his brother's wife, Herodias. But Herodias wanted to get rid of John even more (out of spite, rage, jealousy, revenge?). She bided her time. Herodias stands for the emotional aspects of our egos. Herod represents the way our egos justify and rationalize things.

So, it came to Herod's birthday and a feast, and Herodias's daughter came and danced. Let's just say it might have been a very voluptuous dance—sinewy curves, scantily clad, extremely titillating. Because, you see, since everything has meaning, our ego also has a very sensuous, earthy side to it. Ego is so attractive, beckoning, inviting, bewitching—like beautiful Salome. How can you ever resist it? Herod is delighted and, like a fool, promises her whatever she asks.

The trap is set. Salome (the sensual) asks her mother Herodias (the deep ego passion), "Mummy, what shall I ask him to give me?" Herodias says, "Mmm, the head of John the Baptist." The rest you know.

This strange account of beheading John the Baptist is an incredible statement about ego resistance. You could run a whole weekend course on the topic—how the ego plots and schemes, fears, dances, enchants,

and finally pounces for the kill. We never know what games our egos are up to, maybe even right now! We just have to know that our egos are always up to something, admit it, and watch them like hawks.

The end result, of course, is the death of John, and Herod thinking Jesus is John come back to life. Of course, he is, on one level. You can conveniently kill the truth, but love is a much harder opponent to defeat. It will take the combined forces of the Roman Empire, Herod, the chief priests, and a misled, frustrated crowd to get rid of Jesus. And then Jesus rises again, because love is like that if you choose love's way. A friend's husband once walked out on her, and she said to us through tears, "He can do that. He can do anything, but he can't stop me loving him."

I want to end with a comment about John being beheaded. We've seen that John heralds Jesus and then moves off the scene. We've seen that John, like truth, comes first so that the ground is prepared for love, which is Jesus. The danger for us is that we want to keep truth in isolation as information, as ideas to turn over and speculate about, rather than go and do

what the truth is urging. We can only isolate truth by beheading it, axing it at the neck, and holding it up severed from the body. "See my truth!" But of course it's dead. It's dead because it had been joined at the neck, the nexus. Head and heart. Heart and head. Head, heart, and hands.

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus says that when the prodigal son came to himself and decided to return home (become whole), while he was still a great way off, his father (the Lord) saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. Amen.

Prayer

Forgive us, O Lord, when we listen, but do not hear;
When we look, but do not see;
When we feel, but do not act;

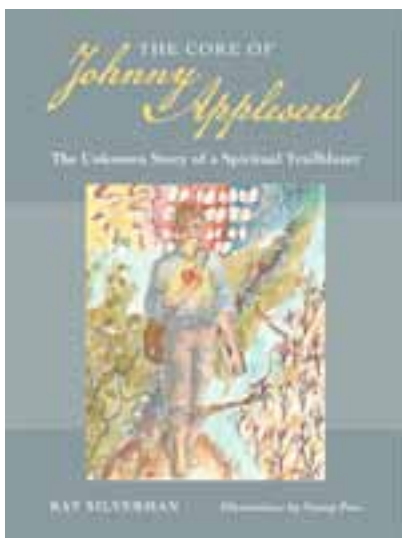
And by your mercy and grace draw us into the righteous deeds of your Kingdom of justice and peace,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Maria Hare (1798-1870)

New Book

***The Core of Johnny Appleseed:
The Unknown Story of a Spiritual Trailblazer***
Author: Ray Silverman
ISBN: 978-0-87785-345-9



Description:

Recent biographies of John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, have portrayed him as anything from a schizophrenic wandering ascetic to a hedonistic pleasure-seeker. But who was the real man behind the misconceptions?

In this spiritual biography, Ray Silverman explores the stories and the popular misconceptions about Johnny Appleseed as well as the truths behind the legends. Chapman was not only a savvy businessman with nurseries and land holdings throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, he was a compassionate friend and neighbor. But it is only once we talk about Chapman's spiritual beliefs that we come to the core of who he was: a thoughtful and joyful Christian who was deeply moved by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The picture that emerges is of a lighthearted person whose convictions led him to seek harmony not only in nature but in the spiritual realms also, and to share his bounty with as many people as he could.

Available from the Swedenborg Foundation: www.swedeborg.com

Monday, October 1

When someone steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. The thief shall make restitution, but if unable to do so, shall be sold for the theft. *Exodus 22:1*

Interior good is that good which is called charity in the interior man; and exterior good is charity in the exterior man. The latter good must live from the former, for the good of charity in the interior man is the good of spiritual life; and the good of charity in the exterior man is the good of the derivative natural life.

Arcana Coelestia n. 9103

Tuesday, October 2

If a thief is found breaking in, and is beaten to death, no blood-guilt is incurred; but if it happens after sunrise, blood-guilt is incurred. When the animal, whether ox or donkey or sheep, is found alive in the thief's possession, the thief shall pay double.

Exodus 22:2-4

"Digging through a house" denotes secretly taking away another's good, originates from the representatives in the other life. There, when the angels are conversing about falsity destroying good in secret, this is represented below, where angelic conversations are presented to the sight, by digging through a wall; and on the other hand, when the angels are conversing about truth coming to good, and conjoining itself with it, this is represented by an open door through which there is entrance. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9125.3*

Wednesday, October 3

When someone causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets livestock loose to graze in someone else's field, restitution shall be made from the best in the owner's field or vineyard. *Exodus 22:5*

For fields full of wheat and barley appear before spirits when the angels in a heaven above them are conversing about an assemblage of those who are in good; and there appear vineyards full of grapes, with winepresses, when the angels are conversing about an assemblage of those who are in the truth of good.

Arcana Coelestia n. 9139.2

Thursday, October 4

When someone delivers to a neighbor money or goods for safe keeping, and they are stolen from the neighbor's house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double. If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall be brought before God, to determine whether or not the owner had laid hands on the neighbor's goods.

Exodus 22:7-8

As to the search about the truths and knowledges taken away from the memory having to be made from good, the case is this. The good with a man is that which receives in itself all truths, for good has its quality from truths; and so far as truths have good in them and also around them, so far they are living.

Arcana Coelestia n. 9154.2

Friday, October 5

In any case of disputed ownership involving ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or any other loss, of which one party says, "This is mine," the case of both parties shall come before God; the one whom God condemns shall pay double to the other. *Exodus 22:9*

In the Word, evils are sometimes called "sins," sometimes "iniquities," and sometimes "transgressions;" but what is meant specifically by these several terms is not clear except from the internal sense. Those evils are called "transgressions" which are done contrary to the truths of faith; those are called "iniquities," which are done contrary to the goods of faith; and those are called "sins," which are done contrary to the goods of charity and of love.

Arcana Coelestia n. 9156

Saturday, October 6

When someone borrows an animal from another and it is injured or dies, the owner not being present, full restitution shall be made. If the owner was present, there shall be no restitution; if it was hired, only the hiring fee is due. *Exodus 22:14-15*

The truths that have their good with them, are those which when heard affect the man; but those which have it not, are those which do not affect him. The truths which have their good with them, are meant by the borrowed things that are broken or die when their lord is with them. But the truths which have not their good with them, are meant by the borrowed things that are broken or die when their lord is not with them.

Arcana Coelestia n. 9176

Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Sermon

"What I saw now was the community, imperfect and irresolute, but held together by the frayed and always fraying, incomplete and yet ever-holding, bonds of the various sorts of affections." (Wendell Berry, Jayber Crow)

A few weeks before Christmas, I went to a conference called "Finding Our Way." It was a conference for pastors such as myself, designed to help us figure out

what's gone wrong with the mainline churches we serve and what we ought to do about it.

Those of you who have been part of the church for the last fifty or sixty years know that, as good as things are right now, things still aren't what they used to be. There was a time when, come Sunday morning, you and everyone you knew was in church. The choir was full, the Sunday school overflowing, and everyone who was anyone came, whether they really believed in all this religious stuff or not.

Church was just where you went on Sunday morning. It was an established part of the culture, and frankly, other than home, there was really no place else to go. The shops were closed. No restaurants were open. There was no soccer practice or Little League or band trip scheduled for Sunday. No one went out to brunch on Sunday morning or stayed home with a second cup of coffee to read the *Times*, because if you did everyone would assume you were dead—or worse, a Communist. And since you wouldn't want that, barring death, you went to church.

But sometime after 1954, the world changed. Blame it on the Beatles, free love, hippies, Vietnam, postmodernism, fluoridation, what have you; at some point in the last century, people stopped feeling that church attendance was a social obligation. And honestly, that's not such a bad thing. It hasn't been great for our numbers, but I do believe that this downward trend may yet save our souls.

Because I learned at this conference that, although the mainline has been in a steep decline since the 1950s, some churches are bucking the trend. They are not only holding steady but growing in number—and, even more importantly, growing in spirit—precisely because people are finally going to these churches because they want to, not because they feel they ought to. And they want to because something about being there is transforming their lives.

Of course, when you go to a conference like this and you hear these stories of transformation, as a pastor, you want to know what the secret is. Is it the music at these churches? Do they have PowerPoint? If we add drums or light more candles, rip out all the pews or get rid of the hymnals, will more people come? But what became increasingly clear as I listened to the presenters was that there wasn't a one-size-fits-all answer. For some churches, ripping out the pews has worked. Others really like the PowerPoint. But what is most surprising, given that so many of the people now going to these churches were not raised in the church at all, has been the resurgence of ancient

Christian practices: disciplines like fasting and tithing, daily prayer, walking labyrinths, going on pilgrimages, practicing hospitality, while at the same time acknowledging and rejoicing in the advances we have made as a culture.

Think about it. On the whole, we are a heck of a lot more tolerant now than we were back in the 1950s—more aware, more open to people who are different. And Diana Butler Bass, one of the presenters, said that the churches able to reach into the past for those ancient practices while holding on to what is best about our present way of thinking are the ones looking forward to a rich and prosperous future.

She closed her talk that first night with a story. She described an Episcopal church service where her friend, who is the openly gay dean at his big, old-fashioned stone cathedral, was doing a baptism. Picture this with me in your mind. The parents brought their baby forward, and the baby was stark naked. The children of the congregation were given bowls of water at the back of the church. They processed down the aisle and up the steps to the baptismal font, where they tipped their bowls into a great stone basin until it was filled to overflowing with water. The priest, in his long white robe, then took the baby, anointed her with oil, and dipped her down into the font three times, causing the water to spill out over the sides. And as the congregation sang contemporary Taize chants in Latin (that's right, modern music written in an ancient language), the children remained up at the front of the church, splashing about in the water that now covered the steps.

Diana Butler Bass let this image sink into our minds for a moment, and then told us that as she watched this scene unfold, she felt deep in her soul that she had somehow stumbled into the church of the future.

I was deeply moved by her story, and I said as much during the question-and-answer period that followed. But I was also troubled. And so I raised my hand and said, "As a young person of faith, your vision of this gay priest and the wet, oily baby and all the children splashing and the Latin chanting—the whole picture—it fills me with joy. It's beautiful to me. It feels real, it feels right. So why," I asked, "do you think so many people find a vision like this threatening?"

She was quiet for a moment, and then she said something I will never forget. "Because it's messy. And people aren't comfortable with messy."

I had expected her to say something conventional about how church people don't like change, but

the moment she said that, I realized that she was absolutely right. It *was* messy. Good church, living church, a church where people are real and the Holy Spirit is moving—good church is always messy, because life is messy. People are messy. Scripture is messy. Creation is messy. Theology and tradition and society try to impose some order on the mess, but the truth is, if you're going to try and work with both the Bible and people, over time it's going to get a little crazy. And that's okay, because God works best in the mess. That's the way it's always been, and that's the way it should be.

Look at our reading this morning if you don't believe me. Here, right in the scriptures, we have another baptism, perhaps the most important baptism that ever took place. Jesus, in his first public act, shows up at the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John. Whether you think about it logistically, prophetically, or theologically, Jesus' desire to be baptized was extremely messy—so messy that John doesn't even want to do it.

Let's talk logistics first. When you imagine John the Baptist, what sort of guy do you see in your mind's eye? He's not a middle-aged pastor with a neat comb-over in a long white robe singing in a deep, sonorous voice, "Softly and tenderly, Yahweh is calling, calling for you and for me..." No, no, no. John's hip deep in muddy water. His camel-skin tankini thing is soaked through. He's probably sporting dreads that haven't been tended to in a really long time and yelling like the late Sam Kinison. People are delightfully terrified, queuing up as much for the show as they are for the ritual cleansing.

John's been calling people away from the temple in Jerusalem, out to the wilderness, to receive repentance. He calls the priests and scribes a brood of vipers when they come out to see what the heck is going on. And he keeps talking about this messiah who will come with spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand. His axe is at the foot of the tree. He's going to separate the good fruit from the bad, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff. "And when he gets here, he'll be so holy that I won't even be worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals," says John.

But then Jesus appears. He forgets to bring his winnowing fork. He doesn't yell or accuse. He doesn't freak out. He doesn't say, "I am the Messiah; bow down before me." He doesn't even ask John to untie his shoes. He just shuffles in like an ordinary person, gets in line with everyone else, and waits his turn to repent and be baptized.

And so I imagine John, in the middle of the river, dunking one guy after another. He helps the individual in his arms back up on to the bank, reaches his hand out to receive the next person in line, and stops short when he sees Jesus. Jesus steps forward to be baptized anyway and John says, "No, wait, I need to be baptized by you." Why are you coming to me? This isn't part of the script. This isn't what we talked about. Come on, Jesus, you're gonna mess everything up. Look, cousin, I've set the stage. They're ripe. They're ready. Let 'em have it, and let's get this kingdom party started!

But Jesus doesn't do what John expects. Jesus doesn't do what John wants. He isn't the messiah John thought he would be. This Jesus does not cry or lift up his voice. He does not yell in the street. People who feel as vulnerable as bruised reeds, as exposed as dimly burning wicks, are safe in his hands because his coming is so gentle as to be almost imperceptible.

Jesus blows his entrance. His first public appearance, and rather than take charge he humbly submits to be baptized. He's not just messing with John's head, he's messing with the heads of every theologian who has come along since. Because, you see, if Jesus is God incarnate, there should be no need for repentance, and even less for baptism, because Jesus isn't supposed to have any sins to repent of. If Jesus were playing by the rules, then he should know this. He should have shown up with a lot of fanfare, thanked John publicly for all his hard work, and then set about baptizing the people himself. But he doesn't.

And so logistically, prophetically, theologically; it's all very messy. But John, God bless him, John decides to run with it anyway, and this is where I want to draw your attention this morning. John baptizes Jesus, and because he does, because he accepts in that moment that things aren't going to work out exactly as he had planned, because he makes room in his ministry for Jesus to be, not who he thought he should be or who he wanted him to be, but who he really is, something truly miraculous happens. John also makes room for the Holy Spirit. He lifts Jesus up out of the water, the heavens open wide, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the voice of God is heard saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

God spoke. Just as God spoke into the midst of the chaos that became creation, God spoke into the midst of this mess that was the Incarnation, and pronounced it good. Some people say that God is in the details; well I believe that God is in the mess. God is in the chaos. God is in those places where we allow God room to move and work and play and be, and it is

in those places that God is still speaking. God is still speaking in those churches, and in those people who allow the Spirit to move as the Holy Spirit desires to move, rather than how we think the Spirit ought to move.

God is still speaking in those places where people make room for God to speak. God is still speaking in those places where people are willing to let go of their preconceived notions and their neat little theological frameworks and their sense of obligation and their well-worn prejudices. God is still speaking in those places where people are willing to live with a little ambiguity, where people are willing to run with it even when they don't get it, in those places where we are still open to being taught, in those places where we have allowed our love for God to overcome our fear of one another. God is still speaking in your life when you are bowed down with grief, in your life when you are overwhelmed with despair, in your life when you've given up trying to figure out how it's all going to come together and just started believing that it will. God is still speaking.

And what is God saying, over and over again? What is God saying to those with ears to hear? God is saying, "You! Yeah, you. You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased."

So my friends, let us let God be God, let church be church, and let people be who they really are rather than who we would have them be. Let God speak, and let the children splash. Let the Spirit in, that the church might be the glorious, ambiguous, and wonderfully messy place that God would have it be. Amen.

Prayer

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way as gives us breath:
Such a Truth as ends all strife:
Such a Life as killeth Death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy as none can move:
Such a Love as none can part:
Such a Heart as joys in Love.

- *George Herbert (1593-1633)*

Monday, October 8

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. *Revelation 8:7*

When this flowing down [of influx] is strong, it produces one effect with the good and another with the evil. With the good it illustrates the understanding, joins them more closely with heaven, and thence gladdens and vivifies their minds; but with the evil it disturbs the understanding, separates them from heaven, joins them more closely with hell, induces terror in their minds, and finally brings spiritual death. *Apocalypse Explained n. 502.2*

Tuesday, October 9

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. *Revelation 8:8-9*

Those who are in the love of self are always aspiring after high things, so after death, when all the states of the love are changed into things correspondent, in their fancy they mount aloft, believing themselves, while in the fancy, to be upon high mountains, and yet bodily they are in the hells. *Apocalypse Explained n. 510.2*

Wednesday, October 10

The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter. *Revelation 8:10-11*

It is to be noted that all those who are in the love of self, if they study the Word, falsify its truths, for the reason that all truth is out of heaven from the Lord, and nothing of it from what is man's own [proprium], and those who are in the love of self are immersed in what is their own [proprium], and from that they obtain every idea of thought respecting the truths of the Word. *Apocalypse Explained n. 517.2*

Thursday, October 11

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night. Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!" *Revelation 8:12-13*

Those who are in spiritual light are in genuine truths, and also when they hear truths that they had not before known, they immediately acknowledge them and see that they are truths. It is otherwise with those who are in natural light. When such hear truths they receive them, not because they see or perceive them, but because they are told them by men of reputation in whom they have confidence; the faith, therefore, of most of such is from others, and yet they are in a life according to faith. *Apocalypse Explained n. 527.3*

Friday, October 12

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; 2he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. *Revelation 9:1*

Those falsify the knowledges of truth and good from the Word who acknowledge the Word but apply it to favor their loves and to favor principles that are from self-intelligence, thus they turn the truths of the Word into falsities, and thus the knowledges of good and truth with them perish. *Apocalypse Explained n. 535*

Saturday, October 13

Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. *Revelation 9:3-4*

If one has the understanding of truth and the will of good he is truly a human, for truth and good are from the Lord, and it is from the Lord alone that a human is human. *Apocalypse Explained n. 546.2*

Genesis 32:9-12, 24-31

And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. Yet you have said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.'"

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

Luke 18: 1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Conscience is a new will and a new understanding from the Lord; thus it is the Lord's presence in a man; and this the nearer, in proportion as the man is in the affection of good or of truth. If the Lord's presence is nearer than in proportion as the man is in the affection of good or of truth, the man comes into temptation. The reason is that the evils and falsities which are in the man, tempered by the goods and truths that are in him, cannot endure a nearer presence. This may be seen from the things that take place in the other life: that evil spirits cannot possibly approach any heavenly society without beginning to feel anguish and torment; also that evil spirits cannot endure to have angels look upon them, for they are instantly tortured and fall into a swoon; and also from the fact that hell is remote from heaven, for the reason that it cannot endure heaven, that is, the Lord's presence which is in heaven.

Sermon

Our music last Sunday, as well as today, has included compositions on autumn. As we are reminded when we drive through the countryside or walk down tree-lined streets, autumn has arrived.

Along with turning leaves and kids in costumes, October is also a time when colleges and high schools celebrate homecoming. The University of Missouri currently holds the title for the first homecoming; in 1911 they encouraged their alumni to return to the school on one particular weekend and celebrated the event with a parade in their honor.

Mizzou may hold the title to the first homecoming football game, but the experience or act of homecoming has been around for a long, long time. A key element of a homecoming is its opposite—leaving home. While we don't celebrate people leaving home in the same way that we honor their homecoming (OK, parents probably do sometimes!), leaving home is an experience that almost everyone goes through in some form or another. Stepping out to explore the world! Facing the wilds under your own power!

Or, in the case of Jacob, running away from home out of self-protection and fear.

As is true for everyone who leaves home, this turned out to be a valuable experience for Jacob. He moved away, got a job—not necessarily the job he would have liked, but he started in the metaphorical mailroom and worked his way up at Laban and Co. He built a new life for himself, a life that included the love of his life. If only he could have married her the first time around, he wouldn't have needed

to stay all those extra years. After twenty-two years, eleven children, and the amassing of a considerable pile of wealth, Jacob decides to return to his ancestral home—to make a homecoming.

The prodigal son, Jacob's return, the people of Israel returning from Egypt: the Bible and numerous literary, cinematographic, and other works have been dedicated to the universal human experience of homecoming. Maxwell House commercials tell us how great it is to come home, especially if you arrive at 5 a.m. and make coffee for your sleeping family. We are reminded that coming home gives us a feeling of warmth, with the friendly faces, the familiar ground.

But the homecoming stories are also filled with other messages. After all, as the old cliché states, you can never go home again. The streets may be the same, but the home-arriving traveler sees them a little differently. While I was in high school, I revisited my elementary school, which was about to be demolished. The colors and the pictures were basically the same, but the formerly chin-high water fountains barely reached my waist. My primary-school alma mater had not changed, but I certainly had.

Isn't it odd how the experience of returning home can include both welcome and estrangement? In much the same way, we can both welcome and dread leaving home. The act of leaving changes the person who goes. He or she lives in a different world, is responsible for a variety of previously unimaginable details. Often, the world grows a little more complex and little grayer when a person heads off alone. Some childhood ideals and dreams get pushed to the wayside.

This is where Jacob stands at the beginning of our passage today. He, for better or worse and right or wrong, is responsible for his household's future. He has been given a blessing and a mission to care for his ancestors and descendants. Jacob went to his uncle's house to get a wife so that he could have a family. It wasn't as though he was just running out to the corner store, but no one expected him to take twenty-two years to return.

Rather than just finding a wife, he fell in love. He worked, and worked, and worked some more for that love. He labored away until the birth of his eleventh child, the child of Rachel, his heart's true love. At this point, Jacob realized he needed to go home. Receiving payment in the form of the lesser animals of the flock, he left his uncle's house with his family to return home.

Jacob receives the vision of the ladder, granted to him because he has remembered what he has left—namely, his duty and calling. Then Jacob stands on the border of his homeland. Crossing the river is risky, because he does not know what will await him on the other side. Because he fears death, he now stands in two camps: his goods and valuables on one side of the river, and his ideals on the other.

It is at this point that we read about the very first homecoming sporting event: the homecoming wrestling match. Jacob wrestles physically with the Lord, but each of us does it spiritually.

If we're lucky, we grow up surrounded by understanding and love. Our youthful vigor is accompanied by idealistic hopes and dreams. We have hopes and dreams so that we can make a difference in the world, live a certain way, do meaningful things. Before we leave home, the truth is often black and white, and righteousness leads the way.

Once we're on our own, however, we get distracted. The necessities of life start pressing upon us. Because our understanding and our love have never been tested, never been fused by challenge, never integrated, we have forgotten about our calling to make the world a better place. We have been so busy taking care of our own business that we have forgotten our duty to the Lord, our duty to those who have come before us, our duty to those will come after us.

What happens when we remember why we left home in the first place? What happens when we become financially secure—or realize that financial security won't bring us to a place that fulfills what we know in our hearts to be our true and proper calling? We have to recommit ourselves to what we were, experience a spiritual homecoming of sorts. People encounter these turning points throughout their lives: students change majors, parents go back to church, careers change in mid-life, new volunteer opportunities reveal passions we never knew we had. In these times, the Lord gives us the gift of emptiness, which, if all things go according to plan, helps us realize that human connection and caring for one another are essential to being human. Each of us has a gift or gifts that allow us to be good citizens and loving neighbors.

In the book *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James explains what makes up a "saintly" or "good" life. One of the aspects is a compulsion to act without remuneration—when one can say, "Heaven or hell is of no regard, for this I must do." That is a regenerate,

or holy, state. But James also states that we cannot achieve this without struggle—a claim that makes sense given his Swedenborgian upbringing. To truly change, we must face temptation. We need to realize the good and act according to it. We can only act according to the good if we are given the choice of the good action over the wrong action.

The wrestling match, then, takes place at the transition point, standing between two shores. One shore is the point at which we realize we have lost our way (even though losing our way is part of the way...think about that for a while!); on the other shore, we act from an integrated sense of love and the joy of being charitable and of use to our neighbor. But, as we can tell from our Bible verse, you can't just wade into the water when you are at this point. You are divided into two camps. On one side, you might stand there looking across the shore, desiring to return to your homeland, but on the other shore are your possessions and the life that, to some degree, you have to part with. The choice between love of self and love of the Lord and the neighbor is not a simple one. There will be struggle.

But you have brought with you something that helps you: your experience. The same possessions that you fear losing also help you understand you must cross back over and risk their loss. The very future of the world hangs on our ability to love selflessly. Our children, our environment, and so much more have no future if we do not. While we wrestle, we must realize that the only true choice is the one in which we hand over all we have so that the Lord can use it to increase the love in this world.

After the wrestling match on the bank of the river, Jacob was renamed Israel, which means “one who struggled with God.” It is a divine commission for us to struggle with the Lord and with the purpose and meaning of our lives. It is part of the plan. For when we cross the banks of the river, limping, we are welcomed home.

Homecoming or no, however, things have changed. We are welcomed with a new understanding of responsibility; we understand that we are called not to fulfill our own designs, but to care for a nation of people. We must put love of others before love of the self and embrace the blessing we have been called to.

This autumn—this week, even—are you embracing what the Lord has called you to do? Are you toiling away, forgetting what has been asked of you? Or have you re-heard your call to be charitable to your fellow creatures? No matter where you are on the spectrum of life, the Lord is sending you messages, calling you into your true birthright. Love of family, love of ideals, love of community: all are leading us into a deeper relationship with the Lord, a deeper connection with the love we were meant to embody.

As we wrestle with the future, with our actions, we simply need to ask ourselves where the future is. It is not with ourselves, but with the generations to come. It is our birthright to prepare the way, and it is our privilege to struggle on the banks of the river, so that we might be the instruments of love who welcome those who succeed us. Amen.

Book Notice

Creating an Orange Utopia:

Eliza Lovell Tibbets and the Birth of California's Citrus Industry

ISBN: 978-0-87785-337-4

Author: Patricia Ortlieb and Peter Economy

Description:

California's citrus industry owes a huge debt to the introduction of the navel orange tree—in fact, to two trees in particular, the parent trees of the vast groves of navel oranges that exist in California today. Those trees were planted by a woman named Eliza Lovell Tibbets.

Born in Cincinnati in 1823, Eliza's Swedenborgian faith formed her ideals. Surrounded by artists and free thinkers, her personal journey took her first to New York City, then south to create a better environment for newly freed slaves in racially divided Virginia, and onward to Washington, DC, where she campaigned for women's rights. But it was in California that she left her true mark, launching an agricultural boom that changed the course of California's history.

Eliza's story of faith and idealism will appeal to anyone who is curious about US history, women's rights, abolitionism, Spiritualism, and California's early pioneer days. Follow Eliza through loves and fortunes lost and found until she finally finds her paradise in a little town called Riverside.

Monday, October 15

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." *Revelation 9:13-14*

It is known in the church that the natural man does not perceive the things of heaven unless the Lord flows in and enlightens, which influx is through the spiritual man; much less does the sensual man perceive these, for the sensual is the ultimate natural, to which the things of heaven, which are called spiritual things, are altogether in thick darkness. *Apocalypse Explained n. 569.2*

Tuesday, October 16

So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind. The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. *Revelation 9:15-16*

The sensual man thinks by himself or in his spirit, but otherwise before the world, for before the world he speaks from his memory, even about spiritual things from the Word or from the doctrine of the church; and what he says has a similar sound as when a spiritual man says it. *Apocalypse Explained n. 570*

Wednesday, October 17

And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. *Revelation 9:17*

The sensual man is in fallacies, because all the ideas of his thought are from the world and enter through the bodily senses; from these, therefore, he thinks and draws conclusions respecting spiritual things. *Apocalypse Explained n. 575.4*

Thursday, October 18

By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm. *Revelation 9:18-19*

It must be known that man cannot be purified from evils and the consequent falsities, unless the unclean things that are in him come forth as far as into the thought, and are there seen, recognized, discerned, and put away. *Apocalypse Explained n. 580.2*

Friday, October 19

The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts. *Revelation 9:20-21*

That "the work of a man's hands" is his proprium, and the evil and falsity thence, may be manifestly evident from this, that for that reason it was prohibited to build the altar and the temple of hewn stones, and to lift up a tool of iron upon those stones. *Apocalypse Revealed n. 457.3*

Saturday, October 20

And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. He held a little scroll open in his hand. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, he gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. *Revelation 10:1-3*

The Word in its first origin of all is wholly Divine, afterward celestial, then spiritual, and lastly natural; it is celestial for the angels of the inmost or third heaven, who are called celestial angels, it is spiritual for the angels of the second or middle heaven who are called spiritual angels, and it is celestial-natural and spiritual-natural for the angels of the ultimate or first heaven who are called celestial-natural and spiritual-natural angels, and it is natural for men in the world. *Apocalypse Explained n. 593.2*

OCT 21 GOD'S AND HUMAN FORGIVING

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

Numbers 15:22-31

But if you unintentionally fail to observe all these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses—everything that the Lord has commanded you by Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and thereafter, throughout your generations— then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, the whole congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the Lord, together with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the Israelites, and they shall be forgiven; it was unintentional, and they have brought their offering, an offering by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their error. All the congregation of the Israelites shall be forgiven, as well as the aliens residing among them, because the whole people was involved in the error. An individual who sins unintentionally shall present a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the one who commits an error, when it is unintentional, to make atonement for the person, who then shall be forgiven. For both the native among the Israelites and the alien residing among them—you shall have the same law for anyone who acts in error.

But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people. Because of having despised the word of the Lord and broken his commandment, such a person shall be utterly cut off and bear the guilt.

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went

out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Psalms 103

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.
Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones
who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word.
Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers that do his
will.
Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his
dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Sermon

The Bible passages for this morning concern forgiveness. I can think of two ways to consider the theme of forgiveness: God's forgiveness of us, and our forgiveness of one another.

In Psalm 103, we hear that God "forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases." Healing our diseases corresponds to healing our spiritual evils. And in the passage from Numbers, we hear about sacrifices to atone for sins committed unintentionally. In Matthew, the Lord tells us about a king forgiving the debt of his servant—and we also heard about this ungrateful servant failing to forgive his fellow servant.

It is in God's very nature to forgive humans when we sin unintentionally. God is mercy itself, and God wants to enter into a loving relationship with the whole human race. God created us in order to form a heaven from the human race. And "being in heaven" does not refer to a place; being in heaven means being in a love relationship with God. So being in heaven is the same thing as being in a love relationship with God!

This is what salvation means. Salvation, from our tradition's perspective, is nothing else than being in a love relationship with God. This love relationship is what God longs for. So we can say that God wishes to save the whole human race, for salvation is that very love relationship. Swedenborg tells us that

Jehovah, or the Lord's internal, was the very Celestial of Love—that is, Love itself, to which no other attributes are fitting than those of pure Love, thus of pure Mercy toward the whole human race; which is such that it wishes to save all and make them happy for ever, and to bestow on them all that it has; thus out of pure mercy to draw all who are willing to follow, to heaven, that is, to itself, by the strong force of love. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1735)

A power emanates from God that lifts everyone up toward Himself. It is always operating. We may not be aware of it, but all through our lives, God has been elevating us toward Himself, into that heavenly love relationship.

There is actually a sphere elevating all to heaven that proceeds continually from the Lord and fills the whole natural world and the whole spiritual world; it is like a strong current in the ocean, which draws the ship in a hidden way. All those who believe in the Lord and live according to His precepts, enter that sphere or current and are lifted. (*True Christianity* 652).

Out of pure mercy, God forgives us and draws us upward toward Himself by the strong force of love. But this forgiveness does not excuse wrongs that we continue to commit. We have a part to play in God's saving love for us. We need to cooperate with God's love and take action, using the power God gives us. We need to restrain ourselves when we are moved by unholy desires. We need to ask God into our lives. And we need to ask God to lift us out of sin and error and into goodness and truth. We need to act as if our salvation were completely in our own hands—all the while acknowledging that it is God who actually acts to bring us out of our errors.

Divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race to save it, and it is likewise with every person, and never recedes from any one; so that whoever can be saved, is saved. And yet no one can be saved but by Divine means, which are revealed by the Lord in the Word. Divine means are what are called Divine truths; these teach in what manner man is to live in order that he may be saved; . . . So far, therefore, as a person abstains from evil, so far the Lord out of pure mercy leads him by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world, and afterward to eternity. (HH 522)

So when we think of God's forgiveness, or of God pardoning our sins, we are to think of the process of regeneration. We need to think of moving out of darkness and error and into light and truth. Regeneration purifies us from all that blocks the Lord's inflowing love and wisdom—all that blocks love, in other words. So we can think of sin as anything that stands in the way of love, anything that inhibits our reaching out to our neighbor and to God with open arms and love. When we remove those blocks, love and truth enter us from God, and we are reborn. Then what we did in the past is forgiven as we accept new life from God. So Swedenborg writes,

The pardon of sins . . . is nothing else than purification from evils and falsities, implanting of good and truth and their conjunction, thus regeneration. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10042)

One obstacle to love for our neighbor is when we harbor a grudge or resentment against them. We can build up in our minds anger against others, so that

it is hard for us to face them, let alone reach out to them with love. Forgiveness is an essential aspect of love for our neighbor. When we feel we have been wronged, we can react in several ways. The first is this: We can bury that wrong in our hearts, letting it build and build until it poisons our relationships with the person and makes us resentful, angry, and vengeful. William Blake wrote a poem, entitled "A Poison Tree," that captures this attitude well.

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning glad I see,
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

We can take perverse delight in meditating on all the things wrong with someone else and all the things they did to wrong us. If we do, however, we are just making poison trees in our minds and hearts, filling ourselves with disturbing and unpleasant thoughts. If we don't forgive, we carry around with us the people we are upset with—we give them free rent in our heads. Swedenborg tells us that whoever we are thinking about is present to us in spirit. This means that if we are thinking about someone in anger, they will be present. And that's the last thing we really want! We need to release ourselves from bondage to the other person and release them from our own bitterness. Only then will we find peace of mind. Then, when we confront that person again, we can feel refreshed in our relationship, as if it were the first time we were seeing them, having let go of the difficult past.

Sweet forgiveness is the answer. We may feel that we have been wronged, but we need to let it go. We need to release the bitter feelings that can develop. We need to forgive. Jesus tells us to forgive seventy-seven times. The number seven means holiness—and the act of forgiveness is a holy act. It brings with it holy peace. Even on the cross, Jesus forgave the human race.

Here are a few strategies to help us forgive. One is simply to stop thinking of the other person. Don't fill your consciousness with them. Think of something else, something happy. Don't dwell on them. Out of sight, out of mind; out of mind, out of heart.

Another way is to consider why that person bothered us. When Jesus forgave the human race on the cross, he made allowances for our terrible actions. He said, "They don't know what they are doing." Sometimes someone will cut me off in traffic, and I'll say to myself, "He must be in a hurry to get somewhere." Or, "Maybe he's late for work." At other times, I may say other things to myself, but this is a talk about forgiveness! If we could look into another's heart, we would understand why they do the things that hurt us.

But forgiveness does not mean that we are to be doormats and let people walk roughshod over us. In Blake's poem, the offended poet confronts his friend: "I told my wrath, my wrath did end." We do need to draw boundaries between what we find acceptable behaviors and what we will not tolerate. Even the forgiving Jesus confronted the Pharisees—sometimes with strong language. In Matthew 23:25-26, we find one such confrontation:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Here, Jesus isn't just denouncing the Pharisees. He is modifying their behavior. He tells them how to act in the future. "First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will be clean."

It is hard, sometimes, to live and let live. But this is what Jesus asks us to do. Only by forgiving can we live in peace with our neighbors. Only by forgiving can we reach out in love to our brothers and sisters. Only by forgiving will we re-form ourselves in the image and likeness of God, who forgives us continually. Let us not build poison trees, but instead let resentments fall away. We are forgiven, so let us then forgive. Amen.

Prayer

Gracious God, though we have not loved you with our whole heart, nor our neighbors as ourselves, yet we pray that you will forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- John Hunter (1849-1917)

Monday, October 22

Again he [Jesus] began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables. *Mark 4:1-2*

“Ships,” in a strict sense, as being containing vessels, signify the Word and doctrine from the Word, because the Word and doctrine therefrom contain the knowledges of truth and good, as ships contain riches; and “trading,” which is chiefly done by ships, signifies acquiring knowledges for oneself and communicating them to others. *Apocalypse Explained n. 514*

Tuesday, October 23

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. *Mark 4:3-4*

About God and about Divine things, which are called in heaven celestial and spiritual, and in the world ecclesiastical and theological, there is thought from light; there is also thought not from light about them. Those have thought not from light who know about these things but do not understand them. Such are all those at the present day who wish the understanding to be kept under obedience to faith, holding even that a thing must be believed and not understood, and claiming that intellectual faith is not true faith. *Apocalypse Explained n. 1100.23*

Wednesday, October 24

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. *Mark 4:5-6*

“Earth” signifies spiritual good, because this receives truths as soil does seeds; “the sun’s rising” signifies the love of self; and “to be scorched” and “to wither away” signify to be adulterated and to perish. This makes clear what is signified by these words of the Lord in series, namely, that the truths that are implanted from infancy from the Word or from preaching, when man begins to think from himself, are adulterated and perish by lusts from the love of self. *Apocalypse Explained n. 401.35*

Thursday, October 25

Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” *Mark 4:7-9*

The truth of the Word cannot take root in those who do not care for the truth, nor in those who love the truth outwardly and not inwardly, nor in those who are in the concupiscences of evil, but in those in whom the concupiscences of evil have been dispersed by the Lord. *Doctrine of Life n. 90*

Friday, October 26

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; *Mark 4:10-11*

The reason why the interiors of the Word are now being opened, is that the church at this day has been so far vastated (that is, is so devoid of faith and love) that although men know and understand, still they do not acknowledge, and much less believe, except a few who are in the life of good and are called the “elect,” who can now be instructed, and with whom a New Church is to be instituted. *Arcana Coelestia n. 3898.2*

Saturday, October 27

In order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’” And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? *Mark 4:12-13*

In these passages “to know” denotes to perceive, and to perceive is from good; whereas “to understand” and “to see” are from truth; for they who are in good or in love perceive within themselves that a thing is so; but they who are in truth or in faith, see within themselves. *Arcana Coelestia n. 10155.3*

Judges 2:1-5; 11-23

Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, "I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done! So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept. So they named that place Bochim, and there they sacrificed to the Lord. Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord, and worshipped Baal and the Astartes. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them to bring misfortune, as the Lord had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges, who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen even to their judges; for they lusted after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their ancestors had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord; they did not follow their example. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their groaning because of those who persecuted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they would relapse and behave worse than their ancestors, following other gods, worshiping them and bowing down to them. They would not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel; and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their ancestors, and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the

nations that Joshua left when he died." In order to test Israel, whether or not they would take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their ancestors did, the Lord had left those nations, not driving them out at once, and had not handed them over to Joshua.

Luke 1: 68-79

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Sermon

I find it intriguing that, of the one hundred and fifty psalms included in the Bible, fully one third of them are concerned with deliverance from one's enemies, either personal or national.

In fact, the presence of "enemies" is found throughout the biblical narrative—the period of the exodus had laws that governed proper attitudes toward one's enemies. Israel, under Joshua, infiltrated the Holy Land believing their enemies were also Gods. The prophets warned repeatedly against adopting the customs of the enemies of Israel, and Jesus taught us that enemies are to be loved. We even say, coming into worship, "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies," which to my playful ear has always made us sound like some sort of spiritual underground. But given the frequency of the word "enemy" in the Bible and in worship, the question that occurs to me is, "Who are we talking about? Who is the enemy?"

To the nation of Israel during the period of the judges, the answer to that question was fairly simple. In fact, the third chapter of Judges lists the Canaanites, Sidonians, Hivites, Philistines, Hittites,

Amorites, Perezites, and Jebusites. These were all distinguishable cultures residing in Canaan who worshiped other gods. Because of this, the Israelites felt compelled to either convert them or kick them out of the Holy Land for good (a goal that, incidentally, they never achieved). You can just picture an Israelite father from the tribe of Judah standing on a ridge with his son and saying, “Do you see that caravan of people down in the valley? Those are Amalekites, son; those people are your enemies.”

If this statement rings a little familiar, it may be because you’ve heard it before, maybe not in words, but in the subtle lessons that our elders and our society teach us as we grow. Perhaps you’ve learned to see people of different cultures—people of different nationalities or skin pigmentations—as your adversaries. I’ve heard that people trained to survive in the business world learn to see their colleagues as adversaries, since only the best in the business survive.

I’m not necessarily speaking of groups of people that you feel at war with; I’m thinking of those groups or individuals that you would rather avoid; if you have to interact with them, you erect an emotional barrier between you and them, so you don’t get any closer than you have to. My personal example: I tend to make adversaries out of the folks involved in telemarketing campaigns. Whenever I receive a call from a complete stranger who begins to read to me from a script telling me how they can fulfill a need that I wasn’t even aware I had, I enter a competitive frame of mind. Only one of us is going to “win” this conversation, and if I can say no even through all their paragraphs written to convince me to reconsider, I’ve won this particular little war.

I am not proud of this tendency in myself. I have set up an unnecessarily adversarial relationship by assuming this me-against-them frame of mind. I would be even less proud if this attitude were turned toward a nationality or religion or race of people. Making enemies out of other people is a costly thing to do in terms of personal energy, and it is a spiritually damaging thing to do because it inhibits the flow of love and concern from God through me to others. It may seem that we have as many enemies as the Israelites had other nations to pick on, but I don’t believe that any outside agency is an adequate answer to the question “Who are our enemies?” I don’t believe those are the enemies that all those psalms are really talking about. Let me share with

you a poem by Leslie Brandt that I believe really gets to the heart of this issue:

Deliver me, O God, from the enemies of my soul.
I am no longer afraid of men who stand in my way,
even if those who obstruct your purposes
and who deceive their fellowmen with their
arrogant and clever cliches.
They anger me, but they do not frighten me.
My pain and confusion come by way of my
own weaknesses and faithlessness.

I strive for success, and am fractured by failure.
I reach for ecstasy and am clobbered with depression.
I wait for guidance, and your heavens are gray with
silence.
I ask for infilling and am confronted with emptiness.
I seek opportunities and run into stone walls.

I overcome these pernicious demons in
the morning—
Only to face them again when day turns
into night.
They refuse to die, these persistent devils.
They plague my days and haunt my
nights and
Rob me of the peace and joy of God-
motivated living.

And yet, O Lord, you have surrounded
my life like a great fortress.
There is nothing that can touch me save by your
loving permission.

This poem, which is Leslie Brandt’s paraphrase of the fifty-ninth psalm, brings to light an important truth—that the real “enemies” are the enemies within. What lessons that you have learned in life separate you from your fellow human beings? What attitudes that you harbor prevent you from openly sharing God’s love with others? What pains that you carry keep you from living life to its fullest? These are the enemies that we, with the voice of a psalmist, ask the Lord to help us to overcome. The judges and the prophets cautioned Israel not to adopt the ways of its enemies, and through the Word they likewise caution us against incorporating the ways of our inner enemies into our thoughts and feelings toward others.

The Israelites fought with swords and slings and arrows, but the most effective weapon we may employ to grow out of our inner enemies is peace—the peace of wisdom in our thinking, and the peace of love in our hearts—the peace that is ours for the asking when we honor a covenant with the Lord. Live our lives according to the best we know, and our

*Making enemies
out of other people
is a costly thing
to do in terms of
personal energy.*

adversarial tendencies will be revealed to us bit by bit. Working with God, we will feel the support through our struggles that God granted the “conquerors” and settlers of the Holy Land. As it is written in the gospel of Luke, we will be “rescued from the hands of our enemies,” if only we will allow the Lord to “guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Prayer

Lord, we come to you this day mindful that there is much in this world that separates us from others, and from you. Though this way of life is comfortable in its familiarity, we need to find a better way.

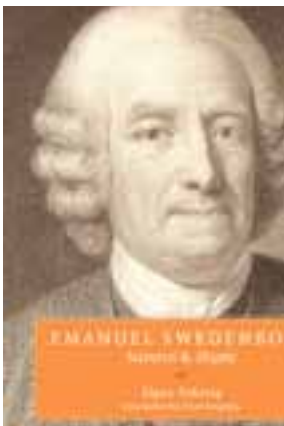
Help us to search within and see clearly our inner enemies—those ideas and feelings that hamper our spiritual well-being, things we’ve made a part of us because we did not know how to resist them. Lend us divine strength and patience so that we may make peace with our enemies and free ourselves from their hurtful influence. For we desire sincerely to grow closer to your loving presence, and to be better enablers of your love in this world. Lead us, O Lord, in your righteousness, because of our enemies; Make your way straight before our face. Amen.

Book Notice

Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic

ISBN: 978-0-87785-170-7

Author: Signe Toksvig



Description:

This classic biography of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), first published in 1948, gives us a sharp, witty, personal insight into the life of the Swedish scientist and theologian.

Toksvig uses meticulous research to paint a vivid picture not only of Swedenborg’s life, but of the people and places that surrounded him. While most biographies of Swedenborg tend to focus on his later theological period, Toksvig takes care to examine his childhood and early scientific training, providing details found in few other places. When she discusses the spiritual crisis that launched Swedenborg’s visionary writings, Toksvig devotes several chapters to putting his experience in the context of both psychology and parapsychology before systematically examining his theology in the context of his life

An introduction by the Reverend Brian Kingslake, added to a 1983 edition, provides a Swedenborgian perspective and retrospective on a work that remains a fascinating, informative look at Swedenborg’s world.

Available through the Swedenborg Foundation: www.swedenborg.com

Content Appeal

Our Daily Bread is a resource for both independent spiritual growth and communal worship, but this cannot be done without your help! We are in constant need of messages and resources. If you have sermons or messages you have given please email or send them to us! Or, if there is a minister or speaker who you would like to see more of, let them know to send sermons to us!

Leah Goodwin & Kevin Baxter
43 Hobart Square
Whitman, MA 02382
ourdailybreadmag@gmail.com

Monday, October 29

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; *Matthew 5:38-39*

When the like, or retaliation, is evil, it is inflicted by the evil, and never by the good; that is, it comes from the hells, and never from the heavens. For the hells, or the evil who are there, are in the continual cupidity of doing evil to others, for this is the very delight of their life. *Arcana Coelestia n. 8223.2*

Tuesday, October 30

and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. *Matthew 5:40-41*

The reason why worldly men were not to understand, was lest they should profane the interior things of the Word, for by so doing they would cast themselves into the most frightful hell of all, which is the hell of the profaners of the Word. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9049.5*

Wednesday, October 31

Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. *Matthew 5:42*

Here also by “lending” is meant doing good from the affection of charity, and thus communicating the goods of heaven; and also the goods of the world, but the latter for the sake of the former as the end in view. The affection of charity consists in communicating goods without any recompense as the end in view; but there is no affection of charity in communicating goods for the sake of recompense as the end in view. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9174.4*

Thursday, November 1

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. *Matthew 5:43-45*

As further regards those who are outside the church, and are called “Gentiles,” they are indeed in falsities of doctrine, but from ignorance, because they have not the Word; and yet when they are instructed they are in a clearer and consequently more inward perception about the heavenly life with man than are Christians. The reason is that they have not confirmed themselves against the truths of faith, as have very many Christians; and therefore their internal man is not closed, but, as with little children, is readily opened and receptive of truth. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9256.2*

Friday, November 2

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? *Matthew 5:46 & 47*

Those who have not confirmed themselves against the goods and truths of faith—as is the case with those who are outside the church, and yet have lived in some kind of faith and charity according to their religion—have not been able to close the internal man in themselves by negations of truth, and by confirmations of falsity against the truth of faith from the Word; and therefore the internal of these persons is opened upward (that is, into heaven and toward the Lord), if not in this world, yet in the other life. *Arcana Coelestia n. 9256.4*

Saturday, November 3

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. *Matthew 5:48*

Sincerity is to be understood as including integrity, justice, fidelity, and rectitude. In these no man can be from himself so as to love them from and for themselves. But he is in them who shuns as sins, fraud, cunning, and deceit, and is therefore in them not from himself but from the Lord. *Doctrine of Life n. 83*

Our Daily Bread is a ministry of the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem

Our Beliefs in Brief:

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

Our Daily Bread

Subscription Form

— New Subscription (\$15 per year, U.S. dollars)
— Renewal (\$15 per year, U.S. dollars)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State/Province, Zip Code, Country _____

\$ _____ is enclosed for a subscription for _____ years.

I would like to make a donation to *Our Daily Bread*. \$ _____

— Please send me information about the Swedenborgian Church.

Please make checks payable to: The Swedenborgian Church
and mail to:

The Swedenborgian Church attn: *Our Daily Bread*
11 Highland Ave, Newtonville, MA 02460

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

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

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

All Returns to:
Leah Goodwin, Editor
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA