

"Finding God's Kingdom Through Gratitude"

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Holy Scripture

Isaiah 12

Revelation 3:20

Insight For Worship

Secrets of Heaven n. 1799 by Emanuel Swedenborg

Out of Divine love, or mercy, the Lord wills to have everyone near to Himself, so that they do not stand outside, that is, in the first heaven. His will is that they should dwell in the third heaven, and if possible not merely with Him but abiding in Him. Such is the nature of the Lord's love. But since at that time none but external things existed with the Church, He complained of this in the words that occur here — 'Behold, a son of my house is my heir' — by which is meant that in His kingdom there would thus be only that which is external.

In the sporting world of life, one of the most cherished terms every athlete dreams of experiencing in the real moments of any athletic event (be it football, basketball, soccer or tennis), is being **"IN THE ZONE."** Have you ever heard of this term, being "in the zone"? As a sports enthusiast, I certainly have. In fact, I lived it once during an actual basketball game when I was fifteen years old. My twin brother, Quint, and I were both on our school's Junior Varsity Basketball Team, and we were oh so proud to be part of it. Our family was living in Brookings-Harbor, Oregon, and so we were part of the Brookings-Harbor Bruins squad--my brother was a point guard, while I was a shooting guard, also known as an "off-guard."

In the middle of the season, there in the fishing and logging town of Brookings-Harbor (which is the southern-most town of Oregon right on the lovely coastline) we were playing one of our conference opponents, the Siuslaw Vikings. The game was close, very close the whole way through. However, with five minutes to go in the fourth quarter, somehow the Vikings squad began to pull away. Our team had played our "guts out" as they say, and we were feeling a bit tired. And the ball was just "finding the basket" for the other team. With two-and-a-half minutes to play, we were down by 8 points!

I remember being fully into the game that night, and I also remember that the Varsity Basketball crowd had come early, which meant that our gymnasium was **FULL OF PEOPLE** who seriously wanted us to win! And then, it *happened*. All of a sudden, I was "in the zone!" I made all the right moves at all the right times. I juked left and went right, got fouled, and

"SWOOSH!" The ball went in!! Our defense was strong and tight, as we all shadowed our players closely, trying to remain inside the other guy's uniform, as we used to say. I remember making three three-point plays in a row, because of being fouled in the act of shooting and still being able to finish the shot with the ball going in. The other team scored once putting their lead up by one point with just 6 sec. to play! Our coach called a timeout, huddled us up, and said, "Okay guys, this is it! You're playing great together." I heard the crowd cheering and singing along with the Pep Band as the cheerleaders danced and kicked and cheered them into a glorious swell of hope.

And then Coach Jones looked at me and said, "Okay Kit, you're our man! Come and get the ball from the out-of-bounds here, and we'll run a pick for you. Just shoot it again, and it's going to go in!" We ran the play, my man was picked, I got the ball, and then was being surrounded by two defensemen. I still was in "the ZONE," and so everything felt like smooth-running water--easy, relaxed, and no tension. The crowd noise faded into the background. My brother, Quint, had fouled out, and we had a point guard in who sometimes "choked" in pressure moments. His name is Scott Darger, and he was wide open! I threw him the ball, and he shot it in one fluid motion.....the clock read, "2" "1" **BUZZZZ!!!**

And the ball SWOOSHED through the net!! We won, by just one point!! And we all jumped and hugged each other with utter joy, as the crowd went wild! And I felt so happy, so very glad to be alive. I felt so happy for Scott, as he and I shared the big moment--as our whole team did, our coaches, and the whole town too. Later that night, as I replayed the whole experience, I was quietly filled with gratitude--so glad to be a part of it all.

And so, why am I sharing this story with you? Because it's a good illustration of the theme we are exploring together over the next seven weeks: *"Living Gratefully."* That is, being so spiritually open to God in a real and personal way, with faith in His constant caretaking of life, that we know and feel that life is "in the flow" of Providence--because out of infinite Love and Wisdom God owns the universe, and will never let it go. This is living "in the flow," as we say. This is the theme of our Journey Program this Fall, and it's an invitation to deepen our lives, finding greater peace and happiness by being spiritually one with God through gratitude, because of immensely loving and wise ways that the Divine governs and takes care of everyone and everything in the whole universe.

And so, over the next seven weeks we will be engaging together in worship and in our Journey Classes how we can further become open and aware of the **FIVE MAJOR LAWS** or eternal principles in how the Lord looks after us, helping us to discover and fall in love with how God is guiding us into living in Him and He in us.

So, buckle up, as we journey together down the road of the Lord's Divine Providence. For this will be a very special sojourn together, as we explore the five major ways that God is leading us gently and often invisibly into great and lasting happiness. Let us then explore briefly this morning what I mean spiritually and theologically being "**IN THE FLOW OF PROVIDENCE**" -- about finding God's Kingdom through **GRATITUDE**.

And so, when have you perhaps had an experience(s) in life of really being in the flow of Providence? When has life felt easier, less stressful, and full of hope and promise because you were able to connect with the truth, as Isaiah wrote in chapter twelve of his masterpiece,

"God is my deliverer!
I will trust in him and not fear.
For the LORD gives me strength and protects me;
he has become my deliverer."

³ Joyfully you will draw water
from the springs of deliverance.

Make it known that [the Lord] is unique!
⁵ Sing to the LORD, for he has done magnificent things,
let this be known throughout the earth!"

I love these words because when I am conscious of the Lord's hands and support of life, keeping all things in His caretaking, then I gain trust as to His power to deliver us from evil and falsity. And THIS is a huge gift!

Over the next seven weeks, we will be looking at not so much at how God works and acts within the many external things of life. Indeed, God is very much involved in creation, in acts of nature, in both the good and tough things that occur. That is, it is true that through the calamities and hardships of life, the Divine inspires people to do many good deeds and be of help to one another. But, then the question is, how is God at work *inside of us*, rather than on how God works in the world around us. As a Swedenborgian or New Church Christian, I know that if I can become more and more conscious and trusting of how the Lord works and moves and leads me from inside of my life (how God influences and blesses my heart and mind, and therefore of everyone's heart and mind everywhere), then I can also grasp how He influences life in outer or external ways.

The five top laws of the Lord's ways of governing and blessing us are:

1) **Freedom**: We have the freedom to choose our own actions,

according to whatever seems reasonable to us. (see *Divine Providence* 71-99)

2) **Change**: When we change the external negative behaviors that we are aware of, God takes care of the deeper issues that we are not aware of. (see *Divine Providence* 100-128)

3) **Love**: We can't be forced to love or believe anything that we don't want to love or believe. We can only compel ourselves, not others. (see *Divine Providence* 129-153)

4) **Enlightenment**: We are inspired and led by God through the Word and teachings from the Word. (See *Divine Providence* 154-174)

5) **Trust**: We cannot see providence in action, but only in retrospect. (see *Divine Providence* 175-190)

And so, the awesome invitation before you now is simply, are you willing to try to live your life more gratefully? To be sure, much of our lives can feel busy, anxious and scattered. And yet, by **tapping into gratitude**, we can get back into that beautiful flow of the streams of Providence that are the wondrous, under the surface ways that God is always guiding us into His Kingdom of Heaven while on earth. Thus, how God is moving us constantly toward goodness, peace, happiness and unity--even within life's many hurts, disappointments and losses.

Emanuel Swedenborg describes this flow as “divinity working among us,” where the following happens:

"The Lord comes in with impulses of love for our neighbor. The Lord opens the skylights and then the windows in our walls. . . . By the spiritual light and the spiritual love that then flow in together, the Lord enables us to recognize that through divine providence He is taking care of everything." *Divine Providence* 207

This is why we find those incredibly beautiful words in John's vision on the Isle of Patmos, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to them and eat with them, and they with me." Our theology teaches us that the Lord is present to us in an extra special and personal way through His Holy Word, as is there "pressing to be received." He spiritually stands at the doorway of our minds knocking. We are

given the freedom to open the doorway of our hearts and minds to Christ (God-visible). Those who "hear the Lord's voice" are those willing to listen and believe in God's Word as divinely inspired, and then who practice the truths we gain by living according to God's ways. Then it is up to us to choose to shun our habitual evils and sins, asking God to help us have the love, strength and wisdom to do so.

As we choose to live according to the truths we find in the Lord's Holy Word, the Lord joins us with Him, and He with us. And this is a very deep and personal thing. And this is, in part, what we can celebrate as we engage in the Lord's Holy Supper.

May we all choose now and always to be more deeply open to and receptive of the Lord's presence, His Love and Wisdom. As we engage with God more fully and vulnerably, we can learn how to deeply believe in the Lord's infinitely caring and wise ways of leading us all into an engagement with Heaven that brings us glorious love, understanding, peace and trust, as we learn to live more gratefully in all that we do. Amen.

Isaiah 12

At that time you will say:

"I praise you, O LORD,
for even though you were angry with me,
your anger subsided, and you consoled me.

² Look, God is my deliverer!

I will trust in him and not fear.

For the LORD gives me strength and protects me;
he has become my deliverer."

³ Joyfully you will draw water
from the springs of deliverance.

⁴ At that time you will say:

"Praise the LORD!

Ask him for help!

Publicize his mighty acts among the nations!

Make it known that he is unique!

⁵ Sing to the LORD, for he has done magnificent things,
let this be known throughout the earth!

⁶ Cry out and shout for joy, O citizens of Zion,
for the Holy One of Israel acts mightily among you!"

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to them and eat with them, and they with me.



The Lord's Holy Supper

For the sake of...affiliation with angels and at the same time conjunction with the Lord, the Holy Supper was instituted--the bread of which in heaven corresponding to Divine Good, and the wine Divine Truth, each from the Lord. Such correspondence exists...to the end that...the spiritual world may make one with the natural world, and the Lord may conjoin Himself with both at once.

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The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the Lord commanded only a few external observances for the Christian Church. The two sacraments of worship are baptism and the Holy Supper: baptism because by it regeneration may be remembered, and the Holy Supper because it is a symbol of the Lord, His love for the human race, and the reciprocal love of people to Him.

see Heavenly Secrets 4904:3

Another concept that is universally associated with the Holy Supper is the doctrine of repentance. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church states:

Can there be anything better known in the Christian world than that a person ought to examine himself? For everywhere, in empires and kingdoms, whether in those adhering to the Roman Catholic or to the Evangelical religion, before approaching the Holy Supper, people are taught and admonished to examine

themselves, to recognize and acknowledge their sins, and to live a new and different life.

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