

“Sustaining and Healing God's Creation”

La Porte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture Readings

Psalm 104:1,14-24

Revelation 3:14-22

Insight for Worship

Heaven and Hell n. 106, 110 by Emanuel Swedenborg

"Every single thing in nature, from the smallest to the largest, is a correspondence. This is because the natural world and everything in it exists and endures from the spiritual world, and both of these worlds exist and endure from the Divine....

"Here are some examples to show what the correspondences between spiritual and natural things is life: land animals correspond to emotions, the gentle useful ones correspond to good emotions, and the vicious and useless ones correspond to bad emotions. Looking at more specific cases, cows and calves correspond to emotions of the worldly mind, and lambs to the emotions of the spiritual mind. The various winged creatures correspond to the intellectual parts of either level of the mind.... Animals are emotions because they are alive and active, and emotion is the only source of life."

If human beings were to be completely eradicated from the face of the Earth and all our cities wiped off the map, there would be an easy way for some alien visitors to figure out when the mid-20th century began: **PLASTIC**. Around the globe our annual Earth Day observance happened last Sunday on April 22. For several reasons I felt it important to wait until this morning to honor Earth Day with you. Perhaps you have heard that given the global natural environmental problems our world faces, among those who care about our Mother Earth we all are glad to say that **every day is EARTH DAY!**

The focus of this year's international Earth Day observance is: "*End Plastic Pollution.*" Did you know that from 1950 up until today, about 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced by humanity? This figure was discovered by two research projects from the University of Georgia and the University of California. 8.3 billion metric tons is equivalent to 1 billion elephants all heaped up together to give you a rough idea of how much that weighs. To put that figure into perspective, the Empire State Building weighs just 331,000 metric tons.

The global production of plastics has increased from 2 million metric tons in 1950 to over 400 million metric tons of plastic produced in 2015! And since plastic does not naturally degrade, the billions of tons of it sitting in our landfills, floating in and on top of our oceans, or piling up on our city streets and sidewalks will leave a convenient marker for any intelligent

visitors from outer space one day, should they wish to classify our era. The plastic waste we produce will be with us for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years from now.

In short, plastic pollution is poisoning our oceans and land, injuring and killing marine life, and now it is affecting our health. Micro-particles of plastic chemicals are drawn out of the huge masses of landfill plastic waste we produce, called "Leachate," some of which bonds with the water molecules from the rain, which makes its way into the water table and our drinking water, as well as into the food chain, which makes its way into foods like tuna and other things we eat.

In a New York Times article written last year by Tatiana Schlossberg, she wrote that recent scientific findings from several major studies (named in her article) inform us, "Their findings suggest that staggering amounts of near-eternal litter is present in the environment--the oceans, landfills and freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems--and the numbers are likely to increase, with 12 billion metric tons accumulating in landfills or the environment by 2050." (Schlossberg, 2017) She goes on to say in her article that "scientists estimate that five million to 13 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year, according to previous studies." The explosive increase in waste plastics production is primarily due to the increase in using it for packaging, such as for bottled water, deli meat and wrapping for stuff we buy. Most of the plastic produced to date is no longer in use--roughly 6.3 metric tons of it. Only 12% of this amount has been incinerated, which is the only way to permanently get rid of it, but then it pollutes the air we breathe.

Plastic pollution is now one of our world's most pressing environmental problems. It impacts our environment, our health and our well-being. We have all contributed to this problem--mostly unknowingly--and it's now up to us to do something about it. The bottom line is, we must work now to reduce and eventually to eliminate plastic pollution. It all begins with education and becoming conscious about it, rather than burying our heads in the sand about it, pretending it doesn't matter.

On the flip side of the coin, I can easily say to myself, "But plastics are so useful to us all, aren't they? They provide airtight packaging for many perishable foods, I can carry my groceries from the store back home, and then use those bags for other things. Plastic helps me stay dry from the rain, and store my stuff away at home securely. Plastics are present in furniture, in my T.V. remote control and on my laptop computer. They are in my car, my appliances, my other electronics, and so many other things too. Why, plastics are everywhere!" And so they are.

So, why is all this mass production of plastic wrapping, plastic tape, plastic pens, plastic milk cartons and plastic bags and straws such a problem? Not only is it killing and contaminating the bodies of our ocean creatures, the very creatures God has made through the amazing process of evolution, but plastic is also leaching into our soil and water tables. After producing trillions of oil-based plastic items, the negative consequences are staggering. In one publication I read this week it states, "Plastic pollution is now recognized as a hazard to public health and the human body. Chemicals leached from some plastics used in food and beverage storage are harmful to human health. Correlations have been shown between levels of some of these chemicals, and an increased risk of problems such as chromosomal and reproductive system abnormalities, impaired brain and neurological functions, cancer, cardiovascular system damage, adult-onset diabetes, early puberty, obesity and resistance to chemotherapy." ("Plastic Pollution Primer and Action Toolkit, Earth Day Network, 2018)

One of the most difficult challenges we face with polluting our environment is this tendency to think, "Well, polluting the environment won't hurt me. It'll just kill a few fish and strangle a few birds, but I'll be okay." The falsity of such thinking is in believing that each one of us is not intimately connected and woven into the fabric of our natural world. ***Think about it:*** all of the clothes you wear, the water and beverages you drink, the fruits, vegetables and meat you eat, all of the electricity you use (generated by power plants run by forces from the natural world), all of the air you breathe (generated from green plants that produce oxygen), the materials used to build your own house (even the plastics were made from oil and gas produced by trillions of tons of vegetation pressed down over millions of years since the dinosaurs roamed the earth), the very molecules and cells inside your body are all made and sustained from foods and animals raised on farms or caught in the wild---everything we are physically and all we take in and use in life comes to us from Mother Earth!

So you see, the truth is, that all life on this beautiful, spinning globe we call Earth is dependent upon a healthy ecosystem and environment. Ultimately, our survival and the survival of future generations depends upon how humanity chooses or does not choose to peel back the blinders from off our eyes and look at the truth of our choices. But that isn't the end of my message for you and me this morning. No, the next massive question is, will you and I care a lot about the millions of tons of toxic plastic being thrown into our landfills and into our oceans?

In other words, will our Earth Day calling to **reduce, refuse, re-use, recycle and remove plastics** hit home inside of you this morning and cause that infamous "RED ALERT!" to go off inside? Or, will you let yourself respond in a lukewarm, dispassionate and non-emergency fashion?

When it comes to being lukewarm about crucial and vital needs and issues in life, our reading in *Revelation 3* gives us ample warning about how God feels about us when we choose to be neither hot nor cold inside. We read that the Lord speaks to us as He spoke to the church congregation at Laodicea saying, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Our theology tells us that God spoke those words to those church people because they made choices that lacked the passionate conviction of love for the Lord and others.

In my mind, at least, our current problem with plastics pollution is something so serious that it's time we try to connect with other churches in our area and region and in the U.S. in order to first spread the news and spread the truth about the severity of the problem. The Earth Day Network has great educational resources anyone can use online. Their website helps you to first calculate your plastic pollution footprint, and then look at ways of lowering that prudently. Also, we need to put pressure on local, statewide and our national government to greatly reduce the mass production and use of plastics, especially in packaging materials. I believe that how we choose to care about the environment and all of God's creatures big and small reveals directly to us how much we truly love our Lord and each other.

And what do we so proudly claim as New Church Christians to the whole world? That we are all about putting love into action wisely and prudently so that good will result. Are you ready to join with me in doing something about this problem? *Let's do it together!*

"How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Gracious Lord, every day we are all so *incredibly blessed* to be cradled by and fed by Your abundance Creation! *Thank you, Lord, for giving us all so very much each day*, and please forgive us for often taking it all for granted. We ask that you would gently peel back the blinders from off our eyes, so that we may better perceive how beautifully woven we are into Mother Earth every moment of our existence, and how blessed we are to be able to put our love (which is Your Love flowing through us) into action by taking care of the natural environment, which keeps our hearts, lungs and every part of us vibrantly alive, so that we are free to do Your will in life if we wish. On this Earth Day, we ask that You would give us the wisdom and conviction to gradually make many changes to stop over-producing so much plastic, which is slowly hurting

and killing your world. Help us to love You, Lord, by loving the world and all her creatures You have made. Amen.

Psalm 104:1,14-24

¹ Praise the LORD, O my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

¹⁴ He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:

¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.

¹⁶ The trees of the LORD are well watered,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷ There the birds make their nests;
the stork has its home in the junipers.

¹⁸ The high mountains belong to the wild goats;
the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.

¹⁹ He made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun knows when to go down.

²⁰ You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.

²¹ The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.

²² The sun rises, and they steal away;
they return and lie down in their dens.

²³ Then people go out to their work,
to their labor until evening.

²⁴ How many are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Revelation 3:14-22

To the Church in Laodicea

¹⁴ “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. ²⁰ Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

²¹ To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on His throne. ²² Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”