

“Encountering ‘The Word’ Made Flesh”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture Readings

Psalm 84:1-5,10-11

John 1:6-18

Hymns/Songs

“I've Got Peace Like A River" 478

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2R4D6qhaD8>

“O Perfect Love" 333

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIs0SrJYUk>

“What A Wonderful World" (*lyrics provided in bulletin*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nGKqH26xlg>

Psalm 84:1-5,10-11

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! *Selah*

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

John 1:6-18

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. ¹² But to all

who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The Word Became Flesh

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'") ¹⁶ For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

Insight for Worship

Heavenly Secrets 44 by Emanuel Swedenborg

Like the earth, we are unable to produce any good unless we have first been sown with religious insights, which enable us to see what to believe and do. The role of the intellect is to hear the Word, while the role of the will is to do it. To hear the Word and not act is to claim we believe it, although we do not live by it. People who act like this separate the two and split their minds. The Lord says they are foolish:

"Everyone who hears my words and does them I compare to a prudent person, who built his house on rock. But everyone who hears my words and does not do them I compare to a stupid man who built his house on sand."
(*Matthew 7:24, 26*)

SERMON: "Encountering 'the Word' Made Flesh"

When you personally read or hear being read out loud in worship this Prologue to John's Gospel, which scholars see as Chapter 1:1-18, what happens inside of you? What thoughts do you have?

For me, I would summarize my response to *John 1* as essentially joy and gladness far beyond words for me to fully describe. For me, this Prologue section of my favorite of the four Gospels is the best and most divine truth I have ever heard and read in my entire life. How else can I put it, how I feel about the very best news of all time that in the fullness of time when our world was sinking into the mire of devastating spiritual bleakness, the One true God of the universe (who is the inspiration of all good religions on Earth) clothed Himself with our finite flesh and mind in Jesus Christ. And as John's incredibly beautiful words say it *so very well*: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt

among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (vs. 14-15)

Spiritually speaking, this is really a love story. It’s the story of God who is pure, infinite and eternal Love-and-Truth itself coming here among us to save the world from drowning in evil and gloom. But, this is much more than an historical expression of what God did 2021 years ago; this is also a song or a vision of what the Lord does for all of us thousands of times throughout our lives! In other words, think of all of the times in your life when you were suffering with hopelessness, when things may have appeared to be too overwhelming even for God to come through for you. Try sitting down some time by yourself, and starting from when you a child...think of the many, many times when you found yourself in serious desperation, and then...miraculously a ray of Divine sunshine, a ray of hope somehow pierced its way through the gloom and doom...showing you the way forward...with a ***real feeling of hopefulness inside***.

It is during our own desperate moments in life when the Lord intervenes on our behalf...just because He loves you unfathomably. These are times in our lives when the living, personal meaning of John’s first chapter come alive for us and within us, helping us again and again to believe in God who came here with us on Earth long ago, **revealing His “grace upon grace” for us all. When we need the Lord to come down out of His infinite, unreachable Divine-Being itself, to scamper down the walls of the spiritual ravine we have fallen into, then this beautiful Divine love story happens again! And then we come face to face with our own encounter with “the Word made flesh,” who saves us when things are not only desperate, but when we feel like we’re sliding downhill, ready to fall into an abyss of darkness! **These are moments when we need the Lord the most, and then He comes...in all of His gracious Light from Love shining into the darkness!** In other words, the Lord intervenes and He comes to us in His Divine-Humanity and saves the day.**

I love the way Swedenborg describes this aspect of the Lord’s Divine nature in *Secrets of Heaven* n. 8165: **“When a crisis reaches the utmost limit of our strength,... when we are sliding downhill to a fall, the Lord lifts us up, freeing us from despair. Most of the time we are then brought into a state of hope.”**

We’re talking here about “the Word of God,” the Mind and reasoning power of the Lord literally infusing its beautiful goodness, hope and wisdom within the fibers of our personal, finite minds! When was the last time you found yourself sliding downhill from desperation or feeling like things appeared hopeless, and then suddenly out of nowhere God came! The Lord reached out with both of His enormous Divine hands and scooped you up, keeping you from falling, rescuing you personally.

When I look back over my lifetime, I can remember dozens and dozens of times when it felt like in my darkest hours, suddenly the Lord interceded in the best of ways, shining His Divine Light of love and truth upon my situation helping me realize that in Him, in my Lord Jesus and Savior, things aren't nearly as difficult as I had imagined. One time it happened when I was around 7 yrs. old and I was enjoying my first seriously fun, solo excursion on the first bicycle my parents bought for me. We didn't have much money, so my bike was a garage sale "special." But it had the coolest deep red, kind of sparkly bicycle seat! And it was all just for me.

It was a single-speed bike with those pedal brakes, which engage by stepping backward and down somewhat with one's foot. And of course, my first bicycle had training wheels on it. Well, for several days and then on several excursions down to our neighborhood park, I loved trying this new birthday gift out, figuring out how it worked, within the watchful gaze of my parents. Then, on another day with no one else around, I figured it was time for me to try out my bike *for real*, which meant taking it up and up and up this steep hill we lived on, named Gladys Avenue in El Cerrito, California. I had gone up around fifty or sixty feet past our driveway. Then, my moment of truth! I eased the handlebars turning down that huge, long street (which in total was a full city block long). It didn't take long for gravity to pull me and my bike southward, picking up speed! I felt the rush of speed climbing.....and then!! Oh no, somehow, the pedal breaking system of that bicycle was broken!

I pushed down again and again and again on the breaks, but nothing happened! I felt my bike picking up speed and I stared quickly all the way down that very long block of Gladys Avenue and I saw the horrifying reality that there was a cross street at the bottom of the hill, named Navalear Stret. And I knew that I had to do something fast to prevent me and my bike from reaching the bottom, zooming at some massive speed where a car could easily come along, ending my life prematurely. Somehow my brain worked incredibly fast and with great clarity, telling me my only recourse was to try to veer to the right and then enter my family's driveway and hope for a miracle. In a few seconds our driveway was there, and so I steered into it at a fast pace, with no breaks whatsoever to help me stop. I went bumpidy-bumpidy-bumpidy over our front lawn, and then I saw what I thought would be my peril! At the bottom of our front lawn was a short, dividing brick wall, where our lawn ended and the driveway of our neighbors began. I didn't have the guts to dive off of my bike like Superboy, so I took my chances! My front tire slammed into that little brick wall with great force, launching both me and my bicycle into the air!! For a split second I felt just like Superman, flying through the air...until...WHAM!!! Both my bike and I landed squarely upon the rear trunk of our neighbor's light-blue sedan, and we skidded perfectly over it! And I felt in that brief moment that I wasn't alone, that some invisibly good Force had me in His Hands. And then, THUD!! My bike and I landed together onto the cement of their driveway, but amazingly, the only injury I had was a nosebleed. No major bumps or bruises, and no fractured or broken bones. In my moments of bleakness when I felt I was alone about

to meet my doom, somehow, miraculously...all I had was a very frightened heart and some blood coming out of my nose.

Incredible! Unfathomable. But, it was true. I realized later on when I studied the meaning of “the Word made flesh,” the Logos as John put it in Greek, the infinitely fast and great Mind of God took over inside of me, enabling me to realize the course I needed to take. Indeed, the Grace of the Lord was with me always, and now and then it intervened for me when I needed Him to.

Some years later, I learned about another conspicuous time when the truth of the Lord’s influence intervened, but this was on the world’s stage. Vice President George Bush was representing our United States at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved in those somber moments by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid to close it, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: [She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest](#). There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, a greater life, a better life ahead for him...and she knew that that life was best represented by Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was resurrected into His full, Divine glory on Easter morn. And with downcast statesmen watching her every move, she knew and felt that the same Lord Jesus...God in His Divine-Humanity...might yet have mercy on her husband. She *believed* in the Divine Powers of God who pierced the veil between Heaven and Earth within the incarnation of Christ on Earth!

In conclusion, for you and I here this morning, we have the choice of opening the doorway into a ***deeply spiritual belief*** in the Word made flesh. This means much more than believing that Jehovah God the Father clothed Himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. ***Real belief in Christ means believing in Him fully***, as God Almighty, the All-Powerful Creator humbly came to life in the Son of Man, full of grace and truth. This depth of truly spiritual belief means also believing in what He taught and the life-regenerating power God pours through us as we follow His precepts in daily life. This is why Peter began to sink after first walking on top of the water—he began focusing on the mere human elements of Jesus from Nazareth, rather than on God Himself living fully through the person of the Messiah, the Savior, who gave us His commandment, to love each other, to serve one another and to love my neighbor as myself. Now we can understand why the people from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth were unable to believe in Him, because they only saw the boy and young man in natural human form; they were unable to believe in Him as God in His Divine-Humanity.

In Jesus Christ we are bidden by John the Apostle to encounter “the Word made flesh,” who dwells among us and inside of us, full of grace and truth. This is the choice

the Lord gives each one of us who believe in His name. That is, to forge ahead each day, even when we feel the darkness forming around us—believing that the Life-force within the Lord shall always shine into the darkness, giving us Light! Aren't we, like many others, so very, very blessed to encounter the sublime truth of the Lord's glory, shining upon us all? Not just on Sundays, my friends, but on every day and every hour we live. Amen.