

“Honoring the Gift of Life We’ve Been Given”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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September 5, 2021

Scripture Readings

Psalm 34:15-18

Matthew 5:1-5

Hymns/Songs

“This Is the Day” (*sung twice*)

“Abide With Me” 642

“O Love that Wilt Not Let Me Go” 552

Psalm 34:15-18

¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
and His ears toward their cry.

¹⁶ The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

¹⁷ When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Matthew 5:1-5

The Sermon on the Mount

Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Insight for Worship

Heaven and Hell 414 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“People in heaven are continually progressing toward the springtime of life. The more thousands of years they live, the more pleasant and happy is their springtime. This continues forever, increasing according to the growth and level of their love, thoughtfulness, and faith.”

SERMON: “Honoring the Gift of Life We’ve Been Given”

Bob Hope was one of the great comedians of the last century, and he was one of my favorites. As he was getting along in years, he once commented that he’d been reading and was astonished to discover the following information:

“Today my heart beat over 103,000 times,
my blood traveled 168 million miles,
I breathed 23,400 times,
I inhaled 438 cubic feet of air, ate 3 pounds of food, and drank 2.9 pounds of liquid,
I perspired 1.43 pints... gave off 85.3 degrees of heat... generated 100 watts of power,
I spoke 4,800 words, I moved 750 major muscles,
and I exercised 7 million brain cells.
(pause...) It’s no wonder I’m tired all the time.”

Augustine once said, "People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars -- and they pass by themselves without wondering."

I believe Augustine was right. How very easy it is to pass by our marvelous selves each day, without even once feeling awe and wonder at what we are.

Each one of us is truly a marvel, don’t you think? Think about it: We treasure gold as a precious metal, because it never stops shining, and it never degrades. Precious stones like diamonds, rubies and emeralds receive the sun’s light and they sparkle before our eyes, and we treasure them. We marvel at plants and trees that grow and grow as they take in sunlight, converting it into new life in their cells via photosynthesis, and we brighten and smile at beautiful flowers, and at the luscious fruits some plants produce.

But now, what would you say about something that has an ability to learn and grow in ways that never ends, whose ability to think, reason and talk can increase year by year? How about something whose ability to bring happiness can improve every year and on into eternity? Does this being I now describe sound almost too good to be true?

The truth is, that there are creatures or beings that are more constant and more valuable than gold or silver, and can shine even more than diamonds and emeralds...ones that can grow to bring even more happiness than all of the plants and trees on Earth combined! There is something that can learn to become more and more intelligent and skillful than the cleverest animal. And this gift from God is the most precious gift God has ever made in all of Creation.

Yes, my friends, it's you. **YOU** are God's most wonderful, precious and most valuable gift He has made. Every little human baby ever born is someone who can learn more every day. He or she is someone whose skills can improve year by year. Everyone one of us is a creation made by God's own handiwork, and all of us (everyone on Earth) is made to become more and more human all the time—which means that we can become more and more like the Lord to all eternity! And this means, my friends, that you were made to be able to bring more uses and happiness to others....forever.

Each one of us is a marvel to be sure, and every human being made from God's Love is the Lord's highest creation, for we are made to know and love God Himself, and so we are wise to honor the gift of life God pours into us.

There is yet another way that we human beings show and offer tremendous honor and love towards each other, **which is through our GRIEF**. When someone we love and cherish dies as to their physical body and we lose the gift of their wonderful presence and relationship in our lives, this enormous loss causes us great sorrow and grief. Our dear friend, Judy Freeman, died last Friday morning and now we all (especially her closest family members) have been ushered into a long journey of mourning her death.

Grieving is a normal and healthy process we must all go through in life. Grief is our reaction to the overwhelming feelings and thoughts we experience, which encompass us when we experience a major loss. Our normal and healthy grieving process or journey can last for one or two years and it is hard work, filled with a lot of pain and a variety of difficult emotions.

One of the best and wisest ways I know of to slowly move through grief is to cry a lot—to shed as many tears as need to flow out and down our cheeks: to simply have our emotions for what they are. "Let the tears roll," as one of my therapist once said to me. The other thing I've learned is to allow for my grief to affect me as it does, such as, to allow for the sky to fall in, for my life to be turned upside-down, and try to accept my grief journey for what it is. Thus, when we grieve, we walk around under a fallen sky.

There is no one-of-a-kind blueprint for each person's grief, which means there is no one map into and through the landscape of grief. As Mirabai Starr has said, there is "no established itinerary, no cosmic checklist, where each item ticked off gets you closer to success. You cannot *succeed* in mourning your loved ones. You cannot fail. Nor is grief

a malady, like the flu. You will not get over it. You will only come to integrate your loss. . . . The death of a beloved is an amputation. You find a new center of gravity, but the limb does not grow back.”

Lastly, the other three pieces of wisdom I have learned through grieving many losses (which might be of use to you who are in mourning) are these:

1. Stay close to the Lord, for His divinely loving and compassionate Presence can hold us close as we move through our tears, our anger, our exhaustion and our solemn states of being. Pray often, and find verses in God’s Word that speak to you personally. For me two favorites are *Psalms 34:18* and *Matthew 5:4*...

“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.”

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

2. Spend time with those friends or family members who love you. Their love will help you along your way through bereavement.
3. Do whatever else you like to do that feeds your soul. For me, it is spending time in nature, listening to music, and spending time with our dogs and our cat at home.

In conclusion, the intensity and depth of our grieving is equivalent to the depth and power of our love for those who have died. As your grief comes and goes like the tide of the ocean, its power and force are telling you of the power and depth of your love for the deceased. Let your journey through grief teach you and change you gradually, as it gives you another vital encounter with love. And for all of us who believe in God and have faith in the Lord’s eternity, let us return many times during bereavement to the touchstones of our faith, which tell us that one day...in God’s own timing...we will see and hold our precious loved ones again, in that sweet by and by. For we know the truth of God’s eternal gift of life, and we know these words are true: “People in heaven are continually progressing toward the springtime of life. The more thousands of years they live, the more pleasant and happy is their springtime. This continues forever, increasing according to the growth and level of their love, thoughtfulness, and faith.”

The Lord gives us assurance in so many ways, that ultimately death is never the final word. The Lord’s Holy Word is our compass, which reads: “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Ps. 73:26)
Amen.

TIME WITH CHILDREN

Mark 12:26-27

[Jesus said to the Sadducees,] “But concerning the dead rising, have you not read about the burning bush in the Book of Moses, how God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

This morning I’d like to talk with you about this special quote from *The Gospel of Mark*, when Jesus was talking with a group of people known as the Sadducees. He said, (Mk 12:26-27) “But concerning the dead rising, have you not read about the burning bush in the Book of Moses, how God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

The Lord was talking with them about life and death. Jesus told the Sadducees that God’s children are raised up to new life when they die. When we reach the end of our life here on Earth, it may look like everything is over. But our life in heaven with the Lord is just beginning. It’s the season of Fall now. Plants are withering; leaves are falling. But even though the flowers and leaves are disappearing, we know what will happen come spring. The leaves will bud, and the flowers will return. In the same way, we know that death is not the end—it is actually the beginning of our new life in God’s kingdom after physical death.

For all of us at some point in our lives, someone we know and love very deeply dies. And when this happens, we all feel strong emotions of sadness and grief, but there are also times when our faith in God comforts us and reminds us that our loved ones who have died are alive and well in Heaven, and we know we will one day be with them again. We can always trust in what the Lord tells us about life and death in His Holy Word of truth. As Christ our Lord taught us, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

Let us pray....