

# “Chiseling Out the Sculpture In You”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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## **Scripture Readings**

Exodus 31:1-11

1 Peter 2:1-8

## **Hymns/Songs**

"There Is Sunshine In My Soul Today" 399

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

"Only In God" 102

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCVC80EZKi0>

"He Leadeth Me" 110

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpC78nfVdfY>

## **Exodus 31:1-11**

### ***Oholiab and Bezalel***

**31** The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. <sup>6</sup> And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: <sup>7</sup> the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, <sup>8</sup> the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, <sup>9</sup> and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, <sup>10</sup> and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, <sup>11</sup> and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

## **1 Peter 2:1-8**

### ***A Living Stone and a Holy People***

**2** So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— <sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
 a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

<sup>7</sup> So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected  
 has become the cornerstone,"

<sup>8</sup> and "A stone of stumbling,  
 and a rock of offense."

### **Insight for Worship**

*Love In Marriage 76* by Emanuel Swedenborg

Descending the hill to cross the valley, we saw here and there on either side wood and stone carved in the likeness of men and of various beasts, birds and fishes. I asked the angel, "What are these? Are they idols?"

"Not at all," he replied. "They are figures representing different moral virtues and spiritual truths. The peoples of this epoch had a knowledge of correspondences; and as every man, beast, bird or fish corresponds to some quality, therefore each piece of sculpture represents an aspect of a virtue or truth, and several together the virtue or truth itself as a whole. They are what in Egypt were called hieroglyphics."

### **SERMON: "Chiseling Out the Sculpture In You"**

Are you ever thoroughly amazed at how **very creative God is** with the many ways He has to teach us about ourselves, about what we are as spiritual beings made in God's image and growing into His likeness? I am very impressed by the Lord's wisdom and how great He is at using the many living and non-living things in creation to help us better grasp, appreciate and enjoy our basic nature as God's children.

Among other very helpful images, symbols and concrete things God uses to express and illustrate what we are as transformation-bound human beings, one of my favorites is artistry, craftsmanship and builders. For when we allow our minds to deeply focus on and remain centered in our lifelong process of inner growth symbolized within things like the potter's clay turning on God's wheel of regeneration throughout life, we can discover that our Lord trusts us to look upon ourselves in an overarching way as something beautiful being made—in fact, we are "angels-in-training" bound for Heaven after death!

Let me ask you: when you look at and feel emotions about yourself, with what attitude do you tend to focus on not so much about others, but about YOURSELF? It is one thing to foster more compassionate attitudes and spiritual understanding about those sitting next to you in the pew or chair....but it's also another thing to figure out your own basic attitude regarding YOURSELF?

That's right, with that person dwelling in between your ears. What word or words, for example, do you use on an everyday basis to feel about YOU? Do you see yourself as a "ho-hum creature"? Or, are you a unique masterpiece of artwork, being fashioned by the Lord, your Divine Sculptor and King?

In traditional or classical Christianity, the first word I have heard people use a thousand times in my lifetime is...yes, I think you know this word very well by now: a sinner. Instead of first and foremost looking upon themselves and others as "original blessings," instead classical Christians think of themselves and others essentially as, sinners. The word sinner can be defined as: "a person who transgresses against divine law by committing an immoral act or behaviors." But their attitude is first of all seeing themselves as being a sinner born into sin. This, my friends, is not good.

In my experience, many, many of us tend easily to look down upon ourselves. It is easy to overly accentuate the negative elements of who and what we are as very much "half baked" human beings. New Church theology, like some other progressive theological systems of thought, does not play games with the negative side we all are born with. Not one bit. Our theology informs us, for example, that we all inherit a great plenitude or vast array of evil, selfish impulses that we inherit from both ancient humanity and from the bad habits formed by our own personal lineage or family tree.

HOWEVER, the Lord's renewed or New Christianity contains very important wisdom about how God looks at us and with what core attitude does He deeply want us to have about our essential selfhood. In no way are we taught in this church to basically see ourselves as "bad to the bone." In the Creation Story of *Genesis 1*, for example, after human beings were created it tells us, "[And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.](#)" (Gen. 1:31) In *Psalms 8:3-5* it reads:

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
<sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him,  
 and the son of man that you care for him?  
<sup>5</sup> Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
 and crowned him with glory and honor."

In one of Swedenborg's best known books, titled *Heaven and Hell*, he wrote these important words: "Anyone who thinks rationally can realize that no one is

born for hell—everyone is born for heaven. We ourselves are to blame if we arrive in hell, but children are not yet liable for any blame.” (*Heaven and Hell* 329, E.S.) In another one of our theological resources, titled *Secrets of Heaven 1300*, we learn more about the lifelong process of spiritual development we all need to go through in order for our higher, angelic nature to be actualized. It reads:

That "mortar" [or "clay"] signifies the good whereof the mind of the man of the church is formed. This is also evident from God's Word. Thus in *Isaiah*:

“Now, O Jehovah, Thou art our Father; we are the clay and Thou our potter, and we all are the work of Thy hand” (Isa. 64:8);

“clay” denotes the person of the church who is being formed, and thus the good actions of kindness, by means of which comes all the spiritual formation of people, that is, our spiritual reformation and regeneration.

In *Jeremiah*:

“As the clay in the potter's hand, so are we in Thy hand, the house of Israel (Jer. 18:6); the meaning being similar. It is all the same whether building by means of clay, or spiritual formation, is spoken of.

So you see, whether we are talking about our spiritual growth journey as being like the transformation process of a little caterpillar into that of a winged butterfly, or, in the artistic process of a sculptor working with wood, clay or stone...each of these symbols or correspondences helps us learn and appreciate precious nuances of both what we are as God's children, born for Heaven, as well as to gain some insight into the process of lifelong transformation that's needed for us to discover our full angelhood after death.

This morning I want to lift up for you a special man, a world-renowned artist and sculptor, named Isamu Noguchi, who lived here in LaPorte from 1918-1922, during his teenage years. His amazing story is among the most courageous and adventurous, spanning our world several times. Noguchi was born in 1903 to Leonie Gilmour, an American woman, writer and editor, and his father, Yonejiro (Yone) Noguchi, who was mostly absent in his life, who was a well-known poet and citizen of Japan. Isamu once shared that his mother was his strongest influence and it was from her that he developed a love for art. He said, “I think I'm the product of my mother's imagination.” (*The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. Museum catalogue. New York, 1987) Combining the wisdom of both of his parents Isamu hoped to “take the essence of nature and distill it—just as a poet does.” (Sandra Earley, *The Sunday Post* (Bridgeport, CT), September 15, 1985, clipping, NA) He grew up mostly in the rich natural setting of Japan, on the seashore, and there he learned one of Japan's greatest positive

influences: a penetrating and wondrous appreciation for the wisdom we can gain from the natural world.

Leonie, being a very loving and observant mother, saw in her son a brilliant young artist, who needed the tutelage of a special school, one based on a “hands on” approach to learning, rather than on endless book reading. She learned of a unique, rural school in the rolling hills of Rolling Prairie called The Interlaken School, created by none other than Edward A. Rumely. The design and philosophy of this school was influenced by Europe’s “New School Movement,” which immersed students in a balance of both intellectual and practical life skills training. It took young Isamu three weeks by ship and by train to travel from his home in Chigasaki, Japan to the Interlaken School immersed in the farmland of Rolling Prairie.

A huge twist within Noguchi’s great teenage adventure in LaPorte County happened when just four months into his new start at the Interlaken School our American Army took over ownership of the school and acreage owned by Dr. Rumely. Young Noguchi was bereft of his new school, but he stayed on to help the soldiers learn the buildings and property. He had a good connection with Dr. Rumely, who then reached out to one of his local friends asking him and his wife to take in Isamu as a live-in guest in their home—and that friend’s name was the Rev. Dr. Charles Samuel Mack, then pastor of our LaPorte New Church. Isamu lived in their home and developed a close friendship with our Rev. Mack, who helped Noguchi discover our rich New Church theology regarding the living spiritual wisdom found throughout nature...including within stones!

From his great Japanese roots as a child, combined with his own ability to remain totally focused on his artistic task before him, joined with the insights found in Swedenborgian theology, Noguchi learned how to sit patiently with beautiful, large stones and allow them to whisper to him of the beautiful essence and shapes within them. He gazed upon each stone as a beautiful new sculpture waiting to be born! Noguchi was led by God’s Spirit through the amazing medium of creativity through art, leading him into feeling and sensing what the essence of sculpture is. He knew and felt that there is always something beautiful and meaningful being created within the amazing things of nature—a reflection of care spiritual truths and values symbolized in shapes.

And so, my friends, it is the patient, humble and HOPEFUL vision of our many, many artists among us that help to give us what in my view is a healthy way of feeling for ourselves. God fashions and creates every one of us out of His pure, eternal Love and goodness, overflowing with potential to become angelic ourselves. Like the sculptors tools in his or her hands, or like the clay upon the potter’s wheel, what we need is the constant Presence of our Divinely Loving Lord’s hands gently moulding us into our higher selves. Our part is to freely choose to learn the Lord’s great truths found in His Holy Word, and then *freely choosing to put love and faith into action in our lives,*

*enjoying a gracious partnership with God*, forming and reforming our lives within the pathways of daily life. No one else can make such choices for us—only we can do so, with God’s power flowing through us, lifting us toward Heaven each day!

In partnership, therefore, the Lord and His angels are helping us to chisel out the one and only **YOU!** You are a growing, angelic, living sculpture being made from God’s hands without question. Now, are you willing to truly *believe in this truth*, shaping and reforming our lives in the Lord’s Light from within. Amen.