

“Jesus Christ, the Savior”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian
Rev. Kit B. Billings, Holy Communion Sunday
February 20, 2022

Scripture

Isaiah 9:6-7

Luke 4:14-21

Hymns or Songs

"Wonderful Words of Life" 623

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0okXPC50cY>

"Fill My Cup, Lord" 604

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4l2yY2r95g>

"Beautiful Savior" 105

Isaiah 9:6-7

Prophecy On the Coming Messiah

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;

and the government shall be upon His shoulder,
and His name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of His government and of peace
there will be no end,

on the throne of David and over His kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it

with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about Him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 because he has anointed me
 to proclaim good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
 and recovering of sight to the blind,
 to set at liberty they who are bruised,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

20 And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. **21** And He began to say to them, "Today, in your hearing, the Scriptures are fulfilled."

Insights for Worship

Divine Providence 330.2 by Emanuel Swedenborg

"Divine Love is in all of us, the evil and the good alike, and therefore the Lord who is divine love must treat us with as much love as an earthly father treats his children—with infinitely more love, in fact, because divine love is infinite. Further, he can never withdraw from anyone, because everyone's life comes from him. It does seem as though he withdraws from evil people, but it is the evil who are withdrawing: he is still lovingly leading them. So the Word of God says, "Because he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) It is also recognized in the church that the Lord intends the salvation of all and the death of none."

SERMON: "Jesus Christ, the Savior" by Rev. Kit Billings

For those of you who have been listening to or reading my sermons these past two weeks, I imagine you have clued in as to the overall theme I've been focused upon of late. Two Sundays ago we focused on Jesus Christ as our Divine Friend, and last Sunday we looked at Christ our Lord as Master Teacher and Rabbi. This morning I invite you into yet another angle through which it is very important to discern yet another role our Lord Jesus lives out in our lives—that of our Savior.

For anyone who takes the New Testament's Gospels seriously, this profoundly important role that Christ assumed should not be a surprise. In fact that is what His name "Jesus" means from its Hebrew roots. Mary, His natural mother, was told by God's angel, Gabriel, to give their Babyboy this great name. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." (Luke 1:30-31)

Then in the next chapter we hear the angel telling humble shepherds who this

special infant really was: "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" (Luke 2:10-11) The name we know for the Lord our Savior is "Jesus." The actual Hebrew name He was given, however, was "Yeshua," which means "to deliver or to rescue." Another rendering of the meaning of Yeshua is "salvation." So, from the very beginning of the great story of Jesus of Nazareth we learn that this Son of God was already being assigned His great role—**Jesus was to be a Savior.**

But, from a biblical perspective, there is more than one way of defining what this Savior role meant. The Israelite people had known for more than a thousand years that God was their Savior and rescuer—they experienced God's power to deliver them from actual slavery or bondage in Egypt through their great spiritual leader, Moses. They watched God literally drown and scatter Egypt's terrifying army in the Red Sea, saving them from destruction! Then for forty years while wandering through the Sinai Desert region they witnessed over and over again how the Lord saved them from doom: such as rescuing them from starvation and thirst, and also, saving them from being killed by deadly-poisonous vipers. And then after the Hebrews were gradually strengthened by faith and learned how to follow God without question, time and time again as they went up against serious armed forces of many other tribal nations, as long as they had the Ark of the Covenant out in front going into battle the Hebrew soldiers witnessed God's power deliver them into victory!

However, the underlying purpose behind Yeshua God's choosing the Israelites in the first place was that they were to become a holy people—people who cared for God who cares deeply for the downtrodden, for the widows and orphans and foreigners among them. God gave them the values of what it meant to be a people of heavenly character, revealed in the Ten Commandments. All throughout the Old Testament we see how God tried over and over again to teach the Israelites that He was saving them from spiritual destruction—from many forms of evil and selfishness, and from living in unjust and hard-hearted ways. The ancient prophets of old, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Hosea worked hard for God for hundreds of years to try to steer God's chosen people back on course. Their messages demonstrated just how much God desires to be close to His people. The Lord God wanted His people to flourish, to experience peace and joy. God pleaded with His people to turn away from the sins and selfishness that prosperity often breeds. God warned them against worshipping false gods and to avoid treating the poor people unjustly.

Unfortunately, along the very long road of ancient Hebrew religious life, the priests and other religious leaders began to put more stock in religious rituals instead of the importance of living good, holy and just lives, centered in God's Spirit of goodness and mercy. Gradually, over time the ancient Hebrew religious leadership saw more value in sacrificial worship and in believing that worshipping inside their Temple made

them good. By the time the first century A.D. comes into being, the term “savior” had at least several meanings and areas of emphasis. For example, there was the emphasis on saving one’s relationship with God by means of animal sacrifice. Such expressions of love for God were not meaningless, but over time they became the focus of ancient Israelite faith—and this led the Hebrews down a dark road.

God pleaded with them to see and feel a much deeper light of truth, as when He spoke through His messenger Hosea, who preached: “[For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.](#)” (Hosea 6:6) I used to find it very confusing how the literal words of Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, seemed to have conflicting emphasis. In certain books and with certain writers the emphasis is more on the Savior Messiah as a willing, suffering servant, whose willingness to suffer and die on others’ behalf saves us from the terrible punishment that an angry God requires. Isaiah, Paul and Peter’s writings show this kind of emphasis. For example we read that He, the Messiah, was “wounded for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5). The Apostle Peter described what Christ accomplished on the cross in words that echo Isaiah’s prophecy, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

New Church theology helps us sift through all of this confusion, helping us to see that these conflicting views of who and what our Messiah Savior is, allows people to enter into their own relationship with God in a way suited to their life and psyche. For example, within Isaiah’s words we find both the Messiah as the suffering servant and the bringer of healing love and compassion. The part of Isaiah that Jesus read from in our New Testament Bible verses shows the emphasis on a Savior of pure love: “[The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.](#)” (Is. 61:1-2) Notice though that Isaiah still believed that a wrathful and vengeful God above was still present.

Modern day Jesus scholars, such as Marcus Borg, have learned that there is more than one channel by which we human beings come to realize and feel inside that we need a “Savior.” For some people massive guilt is their primary suffering, and so because these people feel like their guilt and sin is what is sinking their ship in life they need a Savior who was willing to suffer and die for them, so that they have a good chance of finding God and Heaven in this life and the next. But, says Marcus Borg, “Some people do not feel much guilt...guilt is not the central issue in their lives. Yet they may have strong feelings of bondage, or strong feelings of alienation and estrangement.” (*Meeting Jesus Again for The First Time*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1994, pp. 131-132) For some of us, major sin and guilt are not our primary spiritual

hurdle to overcome. For some of us, Borg continues, there are other serious forces from which we need to be saved—such as victimization, meaninglessness and emotional suffering in life.

This happens to have been the kind of life-pain that I myself needed saving from many years ago, as well as a decent dose of chronic guilt inside. And so, for people like me my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ offers the Good News of coming home—He offers us a spiritual homecoming from exile in the wilderness. **Marcus Borg continues, “For some [of us], the need is liberation; for others, the need is homecoming; and for still others, the need is acceptance.” The bottom line is, that no matter what our primary issues and sufferings are, whatever our deepest needs may be.....Jesus comes to us, and saves.**

Much of modern day Christianity still emphasizes Jesus Christ as a rescuer from the pain and flames of Hell, as though He were going to snatch people away from the yawning chasms and perils of Hell right after death. And then, it is believed, that when a person believes that Jesus died on our behalf and paid the price for so much sin, then we are rescued and brought into Heaven. However, this vision is not what the word “salvation” refers to, biblically speaking. The word “salvation” comes from the Latin word “salvus,” which originally referred to being made **WHOLE again, uninjured, safe or in good health**. Salvus was not about being take up out of this life, but rather, it was about this life here on Earth being healed. So, we see actually, that salvus describes the long-standing biblical vision of God’s goodness coming back into the foreground of life, where justice and mercy, peace and well-being, and comfort and level-headedness blossom again.

And so, in this depth of spiritual vision, Jesus the Savior is the Holy One who brings this glorious dream of Heaven on Earth into reality. He is the Divine Peacemaker, our Light of justice and the Good Physician who heals. In other words, in all of these ways our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ saves—He lifts up our lives into the warmth and sunshine of Heaven now, today and every day! In all of these ways and more, Jesus Christ, God in His Divine-Humanity saves us, one bright-blessed day at a time. As the Rev. Dr. Eleanor McLaughlin, an Episcopal Priest and noted seminary scholar, once prayed from the Celtic Christian writings while sitting on the floor of her classroom after lighting a candle:

*“I will kindle my fire this morning,
In the presence of the holy angels of Heaven...
Without malice, without jealousy, without envy,
Without fear, without terror of anyone under the sun,
But the holy Son of God to shield me.*

*God, kindle Thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbor.”*

She went on to say that the Celtic Christian way teaches us that everything is holy, every moment, everything and everyone. Christ came to reveal the sacredness of all things, to make clear what had been hidden, the Light of the world. He did this every day of His earthly ministry and because He brought the Kingdom of Heaven here with Him—healing the blind and curing the lame, saving people from demonic possession and feeding 5,000 people with 5 barley loaves and 2 fish—teaching us about His kingdom by way of many parables focused on love, mercy and strength, and people thronged to Him because He helped them rediscover joy, love and kindness again.

Indeed, the salvation Jesus brought us all was not simply dying upon a cross at the end of His life. He brought it before us by living it, by speaking it, by showing us how real and unbeatable His kingdom of love truly is. No wonder His response to that rich young man in *Mark 10:17-22* was not to believe in Him nor get born again, nor pray the sinner's prayer; Jesus simply asked him if he had been keeping the Commandments. The Lord looked at this young man and loved Him with His gaze, and then said to him: "You lack one thing: go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven; then come, follow me." That young man's salvation was not based within a single confession. Rather, it was the result of following Jesus.

This, my friends, is our challenge and opportunity as well. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Thank you, O Lord our Savior, for helping us each day to peer through the fogs of confusion and to see and feel the amazing warmth and Light of Your Heaven—which is so full of love, mercy and goodness—and we need your help in finding it deep within us all, as your children. Amen.

Children's Sermon "Jesus Is My Best of Friends"