

“Making Sense of Our Pain and Suffering”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture Readings

Psalm 55:4-8, 22

Romans 8:16-24, 26-28, 36-39

Hymns/Songs

"Wonderful Words of Life" (2 pgs.)

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

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j48TLIRb4Q>

"You'll Never Walk Alone" sung by Sissel Kyrkjebø

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvRYOLw5WGE>

Psalm 55:4-8, 22

⁴ My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

⁵ Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.

⁶ And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;

⁷ yes, I would wander far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness; *Selah*

⁸ I would hurry to find a shelter
from the raging wind and tempest."

²² Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved.

[Note: "Selah" originates from a Hebrew word meaning to measure or weigh in the balances, to consider deeply, to lift up or to praise. It is difficult to capture Selah's meaning into words.]

~<http://www.selahshores.com/meaning-of-selah.html>

Romans 8:16-24, 26-28, 36-39

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer

with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Future Glory

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons [and daughters], the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Insight for Worship

New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 147 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“We can tell what kind of freedom we are in by what we like to think and talk about, listen to, see, and do, since all our enjoyment comes from what we love.”

SERMON: “Making Sense of Our Pain and Suffering”

There was another title to my sermon for you today that I almost used, so I’m going to share it with you now. I could have titled my sermon, “Enduring Pain,” because for the great majority of humanity, that is exactly what we have to do in life: **endure pain**. It could be a vast array of emotional traumas that we are dealing with in our lives; or, it could be some individual physical pain we’re facing often, or more than one kind of physical pain our body forces us to deal with, day in and day out. Or as we may say,

“Some days are okay, while other days are straight out of Hell, as if I’m on some painful torture test, which comes and goes like the ocean tides.”

One thing seems certain, all of us...every last one of us...must suffer in life. For me personally, it has been a combination of both physical and psychological-emotional pains, hurts and wounds. And if I were to suddenly take on the character of Mr. Rhett Buttler in “Gone With The Wind” for a moment with you, I’d be tempted to turn upward towards God and say, “Frankly, Lord, there are aspects of this life you’ve given me...well, they stink! Why so much pain and suffering for us, O Lord? Why? Why must we suffer as much as we do?”

Well, theatrics aside, the big question that continues echoing through the eons is, “Is it really necessary to have to endure so much pain?” And our culture, which has been dominated by so many Christian evangelicals replies to us that Jesus the Christ endured pain and torture on the cross in order that we might have salvation. So they say that our suffering is “built in” to our thinking. In other words, that whatever comes to us should be accepted with the grace of God, no matter what!

Some are made to feel guilty if we try hard to find some way to escape the sheer torture of pain. We talk about our “tolerance level” of pain. How much pain can one stand? Well, as I said, there are all kinds and sorts and causes of pain, covering everything in the total make-up of our being. Some endure mental torture, which reminds me of an interview I saw once on Larry King Live, of a very strong, battle-tested U.S. Marine Sargent, who during his fascinating dialogue with Larry shared a story of when he talked one day with a middle-aged Vietnamese mother. She had experienced both broken bones and the tragic deaths of some of her children because of the war. And she shared with the Sargent that for her, the pain and gaping wounds in her heart of having lost her loved ones was far worse than the physical agony of her leg being broken years back. And you know what? I agree with her. Mental pain can be just as great a pain as anything connected with this physical body our souls inhabit.

Indeed, our mental sufferings can go on and on through the years, until finally we either resolve it or we die in our misery. But, we keep asking ourselves, “Where is the justice in all of this?” And, “Why must I myself suffer this **particular** kind of pain?” “Why can’t I just die and have it over with?”

Well, you know, it just so happens that just recently a friend of mine asked me, “How can we turn things around? Why must the world continue on its apparent course of destruction?” And there are those who say that the world has reached the infamous “POINT OF NO RETURN! And, there is nothing we can do, now, to redeem ourselves from total destruction.”

Have you heard such mutterings from people you know? Why, they might even say that in the final end the earth will be just as dead as the moon was perceived to be when the astronauts landed there in July, 1969. Not a very bright bit of information for us, and we often pride ourselves as being experts in scientific knowledge. I suppose that

my friend thought, when asking the question, “What can we do to turn things around,” that I would go into some kind of dissertation about the things we could do to “be saved,” in the context of what we hear so much about today.

Evangelical preachers continue to swarm the airwaves and cover the media with their special formulas, most of which consist of the same old line of theological thinking that I’ve heard for many years, ever since I was young...ad nauseam! Time and again their conservative rhetoric heaped upon the organizations that espouse the old line of “salvation before the world comes to its final end!”

Well, you see, part of their programming is to project the pain of fear upon us all. Fear for what may happen in an unknown future, largely based upon a literalistic reading of the *Book of Revelation*.

So, now you may be wondering to yourself, “Well then, Kit, what was your reply to your friend that day?” And I said quite frankly, “We need to know and to discover what the Laws of the Universe are, and then try the best way we know how to live harmoniously within the framework of those eternal, natural Laws, which I believe God laid down brilliantly when the universe began.”

Well, it must have been a bit of a shock to my friend’s ears that day, who then asked me, “But, how do we know what those Laws are?” And my response to him was in the form of a question: “Don’t you think that most people instinctively know what is right and what is wrong?” “Don’t you think people generally know when they are doing something that isn’t right?”

Then I recalled in that moment something that my Grandfather, the late Rev. Galen Unruh, shared with me once during a visit we had in his home in Hutchinson, Kansas back in January of 2002. He shared with me about a conversation he had with some men in the local grain office, and these gents were talking about pesticides. One man said, “If you want to get real mean, use Parathion.” He then added that if you put your hand in a bucket of that stuff, took it out and immediately washed it with soap and water, you would be dead in two hours!! And yet, my Grandpa told me, they were using that pesticide on the corn that grew in their fields!

Then my Grandpa shared with me, while I sat next to him as wide-eyed as cat staring at a room full of mice, that when he was in the dairy business they found out that DDT was not a desirable chemical to use in the control of flies. And, this was after **two whole years had gone by, after a public announcement was given when the Farm Bureau finally discontinued sponsoring the use of DDT in farming!** So you see, then my Grandpa explained that DDT went from the hair of the dairy cows into the skin of his cows, and from there into the blood stream and then directly from the blood stream into the cows’ milk they produced. And then, of course, the people drank that cows’ milk, which was infected with the poison of DDT. And then people would ask, “Why should the National Council of Churches get involved with social justice issues?”

And then Grandpa said, “Well, if you leave things up to the chemical companies, whose aim is to ‘get rich quick’ with some new method of conquering some bug that happens to be on the loose in the world, how are you going to stop anything that

violates the Laws of this Universe?” He then said to me, “Someone has to ask the essential question, ‘Which major contributors in our American society are pouring millions of dollars into those chemical companies that are manufacturing things that are harmful to our environment....and then on Sunday mornings on the T.V. stations are seeking SALVATION from this world that’s going to Hell in a hand-basket?’”

And you wanna know what my Grandpa said at that moment? **“Humbug!”** Then we laughed and then we continued reflecting together, and he said, “Look at what is happening in Western Kansas. The water supply is being rapidly depleted. It takes years and years for the water to come from the Rockies to then infiltrate the underground supply in Western Kansas. But they are pumping it out at an alarming rate. All for the purpose of ‘making it.’ ‘Getting it while they can.’ Is this in harmony with the Laws of the Universe?”

And I responded while a shiver ran down my back, “No. It isn’t, Grandpa. No, and it’s as plain as my hand before my face...and we let it happen.”

So, we will suffer the consequences and the pain, in the years to come, for our misdemeanors and crimes against nature. We may have famine and pestilence because of it. But, just as $2+2=4$, so also does humanity’s use of poisonous chemicals make its way into our animals and into our ground water....and then, it gets inside of us.

Several years later after I had my good visits with my Grandpa Galen, I began a year-long training in chaplaincy as a Resident Chaplain Student in Omaha, Nebraska. And quite a few times as a hospice chaplain I found myself at the bedside of people who were dying in extreme pain. I recall many times those patients telling me that they simply wanted to die, and why won’t God take me now so that my suffering will end, they’d ask me?

And so, what could I say to them while they suffered? What kind of prayer could I offer them to help them find relief from their pain? **Can any of you tell me what magical prayer I could have used to ease their pain?** Where were the Laws of the Universe violated that could have helped those patients of mine feel some relief, knowing what the cause was for them to suffer like that?

I remember one elderly woman saying to me one day, “Why should I have to stay on in this world in this condition? Why? Why? Why?” she asked.

At times after such hospice visits I found myself thinking of Jesus on the Cross, when He came to the moment of truth, yelling aloud: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?!”

Our Lord had to suffer the terrible injustices of mankind, in order to somehow rectify, to create again a kind of operative justice for mankind. So I ask, when I am confronted with the spectacle of someone’s extreme pain, “Why does it have to be?” And if there is anything I can truly say to this eternal question, it is simply this: **By my pain, I am testifying to mankind’s disregard of the BASIC Laws of God. I should not have to suffer like this. But I am, because---mankind has not paid heed to the idea that all human beings must obey the Laws of God.**

I believe that most of the time there are crucial reasons for our sufferings, whether they are caused from unnecessary emotional traumas and avoidable wounds from our childhoods, or whether they are caused by some reckless abuse of our environment that we all depend upon for every breath we take and every glass of water we drink. We should pay heed to the truth of how our brothers and sisters of our world are suffering, and God entrusts us to then take action for Justice.

So, in conclusion, when my friend said or when he asked, “But how can we know what those laws are?” I simply said, “Maybe a little time in quiet contemplation each day, might reveal to us what this is all about? Using the known truths revealed to us, thinking about life, seeking the truth,....perhaps this will inspire us to know and then to do, to take action, to prevent useless suffering?”

I then come around to one of the most powerful things our Lord Jesus ever said (in my mind at least), which was, “...and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32) I feel certain that the Lord revealed all of the sacred truths of life to His inner circle of disciples and perhaps more than them as well. While many of those were perhaps hidden from the world back then, it is our privilege to know what many of those mysteries are. Not to be found in the “hurry-scurry” of the everyday business world, nor in the casual talking we often have over a scrumptious slice of apple pie, served up wonderfully at one of our local cafés.

I believe that many of those sacred truths can only be found within the secret recesses of your own heart, where you are able to commune with the God of your own heart and soul, who is more than capable of revealing deep truths to you.

So, let us remember...if you happen to agree with some of what I’ve shared with you this morning...that when it is our turn to suffer the burdens of enduring-ongoing pain, that we can know that there has been a violation of the Laws of the Universe, as constructed by a **MOST BENEVOLENT** Creator, and that our pain is our testimony that an unfortunate injustice has happened---that our suffering need not have had to happen, and that we can do something about those injustices, to prevent further suffering---if we will, each in his or her own way.

And so, it is appropriate that I end this sermon by directly quoting from Paul who wrote: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39) We may one day feel like we are a sheep being led to the slaughter, but still, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us! Amen.

LET US PRAY...

Lord, each of us endures a pain or pains of some kind, and we ask You to please help us understand the reason for it. And may we know that we are witnessing to Thy Laws, to Thy Love, as we go forth into the day, endeavoring to know the truth. Help us each day to live in the sphere of universal harmony and justice within the Laws that You have constructed for all living beings. We ask this in Thy Name, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.