

“Hope Within Depression”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scripture

I Kings 19:1-13

James 5:13-18

Hymns or Songs

“Jesus Loves Even Me” 248

“Break Thou The Bread of Life” 902

“Hymn of Promise”

1 Kings 19:1-13

Elijah Flees Jezebel

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

The Lord Speaks to Elijah

⁹ There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars,

and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” ¹¹ And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

James 5:13-18

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Insights for Worship

True Christianity 406 & 409 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others.”

“The Lord forgives everyone’s sins and never takes revenge or even assigns spiritual credit or blame, because He is love and goodness itself.”

SERMON: “Hope Within Depression”

As I begin my spiritual message this morning concerning depression, the first thought I want to lift up is, *sadness is not a sin*. The truth of your emotions and why you are feeling them matters. We all deserve to experience one of my favorite spiritual and psychological truths given by the Lord, which we find in *John 8:32*, “**Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**”

When was the last time that you felt really blue or “down in the dumps”? When was the last time you felt truly depressed or hopeless? And now a third question for you this morning, have you ever been through a psychological depression that lasted more than three weeks, and which perhaps became debilitating in some way—you know, like when you found it immensely burdensome to even **want to get out of bed?**

If so, then you may have experienced what psychology calls, "depression." And if it lasted over three weeks in a row, then you may have been having what is termed, “clinical depression.” The hallmark symptoms of clinical depression are as follows:

Symptoms of Depression

1. Persistent sad or empty mood
2. Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
3. Feelings of hopelessness
4. Restlessness and irritability
5. Difficulty concentrating
6. Change in sleep habits (insomnia or excessive sleeping)
7. Change in eating habits (overeating or loss of appetite)
8. Ongoing aches and pains that do not go away with treatment
9. Thoughts of suicide or death, or suicidal attempts

Depression is often referred to as the **“common cold of the psyche.”** It has become very common. It is estimated that each year more than 20 million Americans suffer from clinical depression. Approximately 1-in-5 adults will experience depression in their lifetime. And clinical depression has been on the rise over the past 60 years. Additionally, **depression will likely have a serious affect upon a person’s faith and perceptions about God.**

There was a time for me during my mid-20’s when I found myself clinically depressed for 6 months in a row, and I can say for certain that it impacted my faith and my deeper hopes in life very seriously. For me, some of the ways that my depression affected my spiritual mind was that I found myself more often doubting that the Lord truly cared about me; I had much more confusion in my thinking in general as well as in my ability to use the deeper levels of my spiritual reasoning. **Life to me during my 6 months of depression back then felt like I was living in a fog. I felt like I was on a long, spiritual desert—and I felt dry and lifeless inside.** I remember having a feeling of

desperation and a fear that grew out of the notion, “Oh my gosh, what if this depression fog never lifts? What will I do then? Lord, please, help me!” I felt disconnected from the Lord. And instead of feeling hopeful about many things in life, I felt hopeless about it all. It seemed that most things in my life were much harder than prior to my depression. Things like wanting to get out of bed in the morning, organizing my weekly schedule, wanting to hang out with my family and friends, making out a grocery list, or feeling like I was a worthwhile person in God’s and my own eyes were all much-much more difficult because.....*I felt depressed.*

Now, of course, we need to draw a distinction between the more every day, normal kinds of moods that last for a period of minutes or an hour or so, as compared with clinical depression, which I described already—the kind that affects one’s ability to function normally in life. The regular “ups and downs” in life are sometimes casually referred to in life when we say to a close friend after learning that we missed a promotion at work, “Oh man, I feel depressed!” Or, that unwanted feeling of being really down or “in the dumps” after breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Why even Jesus Himself encountered many times of feeling very sad inside, such as after His close friend Lazarus (the brother of Mary and Martha) died. We read in *John 11:35* concerning the Lord’s grief over his friend’s death, “**Jesus wept.**” Or when He clearly realized how spiritually lost many of His fellow Israelites were as He came close to Jerusalem for His final entry there, and we read in *John 19:41-42*, “*Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’*”

Spiritual and emotional struggles are part of life, aren’t they? In New Church theology we know that the common human spiritual and psychological journey of life is poignantly and symbolically revealed in the overall biblical story, from *Genesis* to *The Book of Revelation*. And when I look at that epic story in the light of New Church theology, what stands out to me is:

- The Lord loved us into being and remains our constant blessing forever!
- Our psychological-spiritual journey is long! And is comprised of 7 distinct stages, which has many periods of growth and victory when we are living in relationship with God and loving others as ourselves—but, there are also normal times of doubt, fear, anxiety, struggling with hopefulness, and perhaps also times of despair.
- Also, that each stage of spiritual development is necessary—each one builds into the next.

- The end goal and purpose within it all is really, REALLY beautiful, though! That is, the angel-person God has in mind for us to become is *seriously worth the struggle*.
- And lastly, that very often our periods of spiritual and psychological trial or temptation battle usually are intricately involved in our current spiritual developmental process. In other words, many people find that many of their journeys of suffering and pain wind up leading them into vitally useful inner growth and transformation.

Our riveting story in *1 Kings 19* this morning illustrates to me where real life spirituality and depression come together. Elijah was one of Israel's greatest prophets, and his journey following his awesome defeat of 450 of Queen Jezebel's prophets contains a number of signs of clinical depression, or if not depression, serious spiritual and emotional hopelessness!

These passages in *1 Kings* reveal to us that Elijah felt so terrified and upset about the imminent threat to his life that he ran away in fear, going off to Beersheba where he chose to isolate himself, leaving his servant and companion there. And then after reaching that broom tree in the wilderness Elijah actually calls out to God in prayer and asks that his life would end right then and there! **"It is enough!"** the prophet exclaims. "Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my father's!" I hear severe low self-esteem here. And clearly Elijah neglected taking in food and nourishment, for what does the angel of the Lord say to him not once but twice before helping him find new balance inside? We hear the angel telling Elijah, **"Arise and eat."**

But one meal was not enough for our disillusioned and perhaps DEPRESSED prophet Elijah. For after he ate and drank once he lay down and slept again. I wonder if during this probable state of depression he was in, that like many people suffering with depression, he just felt hopeless inside and wanted to oversleep?

What do you think?

What is so very important, in part, to lift up here this morning is that clearly this very faithful and loyal servant of God was seriously down and depressed. For some vital reason his faith and psychological strength were not up to the task of taking on Jezebel's wrath. What a powerful reminder that you and I can indeed encounter our own periods of feeling very down, very sad and perhaps even depressed at times. But then, another powerfully important thing comes out of this time of spiritual and emotional suffering for Elijah—he **experiences wonderful help and support from the Lord, the angels and ultimately from others too**. He hears God whispering to him that he will be alright.

We see here in this story that **the Lord our God cares about us in our darkest times, in those spiritual deserts and valleys we will encounter in life.** In fact, it is during our times of suffering, doubt and despair that truly *the Lord is closest to us*. No wonder we find in the story of King Saul and the young newly anointed King David a story of compassion, where God still cared mercifully for the very mentally-emotionally troubled King Saul by providing him with a skillful harpist, none other than the handsome young shepherd, David.

I like that story a lot for another reason, which is that it lifts up for us how good it is for you and I to have compassion for those experiencing mental illness and choose to provide faithful ministry to them, as David did for Saul. Unfortunately, still in our society it is so easy for people suffering with some kind of mental illness to encounter insensitivity, misunderstanding and avoidance from others.

But the church is meant to be a place where anyone suffering from either physical, mental or spiritual distress or disease can find solace and support. Here in ministries like ours people suffering from either deep spiritual struggles and inner battles (which are a normal aspect of the spiritual regeneration process), or grief from a major loss in life, or from a mental illness of some kind (which could be an anxiety disorder, bipolar, depression, schizophrenia, or a phobia or some kind) may find compassionate support. **The Lord's Church on Earth is meant to be a place of spiritual and emotional support—and we hear this beautifully expressed** in *James 5*, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

This morning we are lifting up that debilitating depression is something to be aware of and not to hide. Let us choose to shed a compassionate light on "the common cold of the psyche," and help our brothers and sisters among us and around us learn that there are many good reasons to HAVE HOPE concerning depression.

Depression is something to pay serious attention to, and there are MANY ways we can seek out healing and support, such as: through medication prescribed through a physician or psychiatrist, by eating a nutritious diet, exercising regularly, taking deeper breaths several times a day, through psychotherapy and/or support groups, through developing one's spiritual life and disciplines, and clergy like myself can visit with and care for those severely tempted to want to isolate themselves. And perhaps during those visits we can meditate together on healing verses in God's Word, such as these words prophesied by Isaiah for the ministry of the Messiah, which reads:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound....to comfort all who mourn, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”
~*Isaiah 61:1-3*

May the Lord our God continue inspiring and guiding us in our faith communities to reach out with faith, hope and love to those suffering with mental illness. Amen.

Psalm 42:11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 5:11 But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You.

Ecclesiastes 5:20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing."

John 15:11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things.