

“Being and Growing Like A Tree”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scriptures

Psalms 92:1-9, 12-15

Luke 6:43-45

Hymns/Songs

“Come Thou Fount” 82

“Break Thou the Bread of Life” 902

“For the Beauty of the Earth” 64

Psalms 92:1-4, 12-15

How Great Are Your Works, O Lord

- 92** It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
² to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
³ to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
⁴ For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
¹² The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³ They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
¹⁵ to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Luke 17:20-21

A Tree and Its Fruit

- ⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

**MAY THE GOOD LORD BLESS THE HEARING,
THE UNDERSTANDING AND THE LIVING OF HIS HOLY WORD. AMEN**

Insight for Worship

Revelation Revealed 400 by Emanuel Swedenborg

By “a tree” is signified human beings; and as people are people from affection, which is of the will, and from perception, which is of the understanding, therefore these also are signified by “a tree.” There is also a correspondence between humanity and a tree; wherefore in heaven there appear paradises of trees, which correspond to the affections and the perceptions therefrom of the angels; and, likewise, in some places in hell there are forests of trees which bear evil fruits, according to correspondence with the lusts and the thoughts therefrom of those who are there.

SERMON: “Being and Growing Like A Tree”

In about two months’ time from now, a very special performing arts event will take place in our lovely town of LaPorte in the mid-afternoon from 3:00-5:00pm inside of our Civic Center Auditorium. The new very energized and inspired ministry group founded just over a year ago, the Faith & Community United group, which I helped found, is hosting a special “Singspiration” occasion featuring some of our society’s most beloved and well-known Christian hymns and other songs. This will be a Community Hymn Sing, sponsored by Faith & Community United, which is a gathering of churches and church leaders dedicated to enhancing the positive impact of local churches on the quality of life for area residents. Tim King, Executive Director of the LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra, is arranging the music for the event.

Not only will this be a venue of community bonding and sharing in the glory of fine music together, but also about halfway through this event, yours truly will then address the crowd of participants. I will share with everyone that in addition to our group’s other efforts to try to help improve the lives of some of our citizens most in need of help, such as people suffering from homelessness, we also want to help our Mother Earth to mitigate or decrease our problem with climate change. I will ask everyone to give freely to raise funds that day to raise at least \$2,500, which is needed to plant around 15 new trees in some of our local LaPorte public parks—good trees that the Earth can use to help soak up the carbon dioxide in the air and return it with life-giving oxygen.

So, it is one of my ministry goals with all of you over the next two months to lift up our hearts and minds upon the miracle of life we call **TREES**. Think about this, my

friends: every moment of our natural lives on Earth, God's own life-force inspires our hearts to beat and our lungs to breathe! Right now as we sit together in humble worship of the Lord, we are receiving the breath of God of lifegiving oxygen. We are expelling a gaseous exhale of CO², which green-photosynthesizing plants need to help them live and grow. And trees are God's royal servants who not only help to cleanse the air but they also for thousands of years give us the timber and lumber we need to build our homes and places of business, to lift up power lines and create playgrounds and museums—and in the Bible story narrative we find the impact and role of God's splendid trees as nothing short of fantastic.

In 1913, a poet by the name of Joyce Kilmer, wrote a great poem about trees, which reads:

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

I have read many fabulously beautiful and deeply meaningful poems in my life, and Kilmer is saying that trees outshine the power of beauty and substance of our many great poets. This is very much true for me. Even yesterday afternoon, I stood outside in our backyard at home, and I looked up at our tall, stately and miraculous Oak and Maple trees—whose leaves danced in the wind and from sunlight filling them, blessing us all with cleaner air, while calming our nerves, reminding us to look upwards toward God, with our hands raised high, receiving the golden warmth of Love coming from Heaven. **Kilmer experienced a humanity within trees.** Do you? I feel it too, and I agree that compared to poetry, a tree outdoes them all, because God Himself is their fashioner.

It is very easy to see, that trees play not only consistently vital roles in the narrative of God's Word, they actually are central actors in it too. Not only are fruit and seed-bearing trees mentioned in the 7 days of Creation story, they then are found in the center of the first Garden from God's hands, the Eden Lands in the East. "And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:9)

So, trees were used by the greatest Most Ancient Church era people to tell their great myths and symbolic tales that we find in *Genesis 1 and 2*, because they represent us, as well as our core growth process into angelic beings. Seriously now, ***think deeply about what this means***. Look at the amazing growth process of your favorite tree—be it an apple tree (like Johnny Appleseed), a stately Fir Tree, often used in cemeteries...pointing our minds upwards...whispering to us of the eternity of living awaiting us when time lays aside our mortal bodies. Or, a powerfully strong Oak Tree (that gives us strong wood to build with), or the mighty Cedar Trees, which God instructed the ancient Israelites use in building Solomon's Temple long ago. From an acorn or other seed, we find all of the great potential of new life contained within a tree seed. From that seed upon planting springs forth growing, deepening roots, just as us as children who get fed great divine and spiritual truths from God's Word, which send down their roots of love and wisdom deep within a child's mind.

From there a shoot rises upwards, reaching for the sun, growing into a wide trunk, whose roots spread out far and wide, reflecting our immense potential to spiritually grow our own roots, going down deeply into the church on Earth, feeding us with amazing spiritual nutrients we all need to live and thrive as spiritual beings. Each tree grows and grows—just we were born to grow and grow both physically and spiritually. We like trees can sprout many limbs with thousands of leaves, revealing to us of the many, many thoughts and ideas we develop as we grow long and tall in God's faith and love He sends. Some trees bear fruits, sweet and nutritious, symbolizing Heaven's goal for us to learn the ideas and skills and abilities we need to become highly useful and very caring young angels-in-training. We then become examples of what the Lord teaches in His Word this morning, trees bearing good fruits, which only truly reveal the living love in our hearts that thrive only by having a life of charity and compassion founded in faith in our Lord. Each type of tree teaches us about the various kinds of great perceptions we are meant to have about the truths of God that save us. The enormous Cedars and Redwood trees for example, picture the huge, grand, life-altering and comforting truths we need inside, such as coming into our own personal knowing

that the Lord is VERY REAL, and will always be here for us—loving us, supporting us and protecting us. Giving us all we need to build strong lives, constructed according to His Commandments.

We also have the thorny “shittim wood,” a kind of Acacia tree. It’s a tough and formidable tree found in the desert, which in its good sense pictures for us some kind of knowledge that **“grows in times of temptation and spiritual distress.”** The thorns which cover the tree are another indication of its meaning. Thorns, where we look for leafy twigs and blossoms, in a bad sense correspond to thoughts not busy in preparing for kindly uses, but sharp and cruel, which wound and annoy. But thorns have a use in protecting a plant from harm. Such thorns are like thoughts in regard to protection and self-defense. This thorn-tree of the desert, sacred from association with the ark and tabernacle, corresponds to a knowledge of the Divine protection on which we must rely in seasons of temptation. It is a humbler knowledge than the palm tree, which is the exultant sense of salvation when through the Lord's power comes victory and a season of consolation. The walls of the tabernacle were made of this same, thorny Acacia wood (Exod. xxxvi. 20-34), as also was the Ark for the Commandments and other articles of sacred furniture.” (*Language of Parable*, William Worcester, p. 90) All were covered with gold or brass. So our knowledge of the Lord's power continually protecting us from evil makes possible the holy states of life and worship which the tabernacle and its furniture represent. (AC 9486)

So it will always be. However glorious and happy life may become in this world or in Heaven, still that knowledge of the Lord's protection, full of protective and needed thorns, which we gained in hours of temptation...battling off the hells...will ever lie nearest to the Lord and guard His presence in our inmost soul. Praise be to the Lord, who is our Savior before we are born, all throughout our lives, and then into eternity in Heaven, when this life is completed and done. Amen.