

“Great Lessons from Plants and Trees: Part 1”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Prayer of Invocation

O Lord our Redeemer, let this be a fruitful day! In this time of worship, open our eyes to beauty,
tune our ears to harmony. The fragrance of your Love permeating every moment.
The touch of your hand guiding all we do. Your Spirit filling our hearts to overflowing, with the
best life offers! Amen.

Scriptures

Psalm 1:1-4

John 8:12

Hymns/Songs

“There Is Sunshine In My Soul Today”

“Hymn of Promise”

Psalm 1:1-4

Blessed is the one
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on His law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me
will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

[additional Bible verse]

Ezekiel 47:12

And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for
food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit
every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be
for food, and their leaves for healing.

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

Insight for Worship

Divine Providence 27 by Emanuel Swedenborg

It then follows that divine love (and therefore divine providence) has the goal of a heaven made up of people who have become angels and are becoming angels, people with whom it can share all the bliss and joy of love and wisdom, giving them these blessings from the Lord's own presence within them. He cannot help doing this, because his image and likeness is in us from creation. His image in us is wisdom and his likeness in us is love; and the Lord within us is love united to wisdom and wisdom united to love, or goodness united to truth and truth united to goodness, which is the same thing.

1. Heaven is union with the Lord.
2. Our nature from creation enables us to be more and more closely united to the Lord.
3. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the wiser we become.
4. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the happier we become.
5. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the more clearly we seem to have our own identity, and yet the more obvious it is to us that we belong to the Lord.

SERMON: “Great Lessons from Plants and Trees”

By means of the Lord's infinite wisdom shining forth into life, we find that God uses many channels of revelation for us to enjoy. For example there is the literal degree of truth we find in the Bible, such as when Jesus said, “**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.**” (*Matt. 5:44-45*); or in *Matthew 5:9* where Christ teaches us, “**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**” But in even more poetic and symbolic ways God is constantly preaching to us within many diverse forms of life in Nature. This is the level of allegory, which is reflected in a lovely Native American proverb from the Huron tribes that bids us, “**Listen to the voice of nature, for it holds treasures for you.**” And in the first chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Rome we read: “**¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to**

them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” (Rom. 1:19-20)

My message for you today is part one of a three-part sermon series I’ve titled, “Great Lessons from Plants and Trees,” which is my pastoral invitation to you to delve with me into discerning how we can be more wise and fruitful together as regenerating people of God who are facing and dealing with our community’s difficult issues, such as examining and finding prudent solutions for the ongoing problem of homelessness in this area. In a recently published book titled, *Lessons From Plants*, (2021) by Professor Beronda Montgomery, she shares the latest scientific discoveries within the field of biochemistry and the molecular world of plant life. She bids us to study and learn from the grass, the bushes and the trees that surround our precious church and elsewhere—the vegetation surrounding us right now as we speak, which is engaging in sending out their roots into the soil to gather in water and vital nutrients like nitrogen. These amazing plants then use their soil’s riches in combination with photosynthesis to grow new leaves, stems and roots as they create sugars in their cells, seeking optimal survival.

All plant life is employing their own very “intelligent,” constant methods of assessing the quality of the soil they are growing in as well as how much light energy in the form of photons is flowing into them in a quantified way. All plant life is always doing this soil and environmental analysis, which they interpret to then “know” how much of their growth work shall be directed toward root production, for stem growth and for leaf production—all within just the right quantities that can allow for their best chance at growth and survival! And as they are doing this, they are cleaning their air we are breathing together ***right now as we sit here*** enjoying this good Sabbath Day God is giving us.

So, we are all immensely inter-dependent with our vegetable kingdom friends of a huge variety of living, often green, growing things—which began as seeds, but when touched by moist soil and enough sunlight, become living parables for us to experience. The life of such plants that begin and grow like this are formed by not only evolutionary forces in nature, but also because each thing within God’s Creation (such as the huge variety of stones and gems, and all forms of animal, insect and plant life) are formed by their higher spiritual counterpart, which exists inside of people in Heaven and within us as well on Earth. **In New Church theology we refer to God’s constant and diverse way of grounding spiritual truths and forces within natural-physical things as the “science of correspondence.”** Correspondence exists according to Divine and spiritual inflowing

energy from the spiritual realms within us into degrees of existence in physical things. For example how our many emotions and thoughts within us manifest and are expressed physically by a wide variety of facial expressions. So, for example when we're feeling sad or down and out, we outwardly express these feelings by shedding physical tears or frowning with a furrowed brow. Correspondence is also understood by experiencing...

- What is higher (or interior) flowing into what is lower (or exterior) causing it to live or subsist. An example is how God's eternal Presence in Heaven is often experienced as a gloriously bright and shining, warm Sun in their sky—where the heat from that Sun is felt by all there as Divine Love, while the Light from it is experienced as intelligent wisdom in ONE.
- Correspondence also exists while what is lower (or exterior) acts as a foundation for what is higher (or interior), allowing the higher spiritual force to live within its object or lifeform on Earth. For example, life-giving spiritual truths from God's Word has its correspondent in the form of clean water. Waters cleanses things and quenches our natural thirst, just as truths from the Bible (both literal and internal) give us our spiritual strength and insight we need to thrive.
- Correspondence is a relationship of life. The higher-spiritual element and it's corresponding physical container need each other to exist. Correspondence is a matter of qualities, characteristics and functions. For example, it is the qualities of a rock, its characteristics and its functions that correspond with knowledge of many kinds.
- Plant life and trees often correspond to the planting and germination of new, life-giving thoughts and ideas about our worldly and our spiritual conditions we live in. So, like a big, solid, strong Oak Tree, I can have big ideas and understanding about who God is in my life, and how growing in the Lord gives my life amazing strengths and new feelings of kindness. When I came to believe in and rely in and trust the Lord, I grew to being able to receive God's Divine Love-Light in Heaven now—which is a very dynamic, very intimate journey of personally receiving the Lord's Spirit and Life-force deep inside of my own being—like the huge Oak Tree growing in our backyard at home. Think about how many lovely and fruitful ideas and ways of thinking we each employ day and night, which help us grow and learn and use many truths we find in Scripture and in Nature full of symbolism.

In Chapter 1 of *Lessons from Plants*, we learn from Professor Montgomery, **“All of the activity that plants engage in—operating sophisticated light catching systems, foraging for nutrients [in the soil via root systems], communicating warnings of danger to others within their community—is how plants sense and adapt to their environments. It is how they survive and thrive. And it is occurring all of the time, right in front of us.”** (p. 1) Dr. Montgomery posits that by carefully studying and learning from plants and how they work together to assess and participate intelligently with their environment, like them we can gain further insight into how to live with purpose, agency and intention. An example for her about what plants have taught her about how to live more wisely is **to be sure she takes enough time for intentional self-reflection**. It’s vital that we take the time we need to carefully assess our environmental conditions. She adds that “prioritized reflection time” helps her to sense and understand the ever-changing conditions of environment and to grasp available resources and support, which leads then into responding wisely in accordance with how she communicates with others in her life. She calls this **processing and then proceeding intelligently**.

An example of this for everyone in our city of LaPorte is, that we have a decades-old problem of not addressing the needs of some of our neighbors struggling with being homeless in this region. Several days ago when I came here to lead our new adult Grief Support Group, I found a homeless man sleeping outside my office door at Manna House. Right now we have approximately 66 individuals and families who are homeless in LaPorte, and so this is our city wide challenge before us. Our ability to glean the truth about this problem, understanding our mutual resources here together as a community, and then discerning a fruitful way of managing it is how our vegetation-like thinking and wisdom collective can figure out how to proceed. “Sunlight and nutrients [in our environment] are not static, and neither are the circumstances of our lives. When a situation changes, it’s important to be aware and to respond accordingly,” writes Dr. Montgomery (ibid. p. 31). Plants of every kind are constantly adjusting and readjusting to their outside circumstances. We too can achieve a more brilliant and wise way of collectively assessing and re-assessing our own situations we are in, which is what our Faith & Community United Group is doing together. Addressing our city’s homeless challenges before us is among our top five issues we are working on together. And each of you are always welcome to participate in and help us with this major challenge. As we work on a wide variety of issues before us, encouraging a wide diversity of resources and ways of seeing and thinking about such things, our thoughts and insights engage in an amazing depth of diversity within us. And as Barb noted with me in an email this week, we can **“think of the diversity of trees and plants, living together, sharing**

water and nutrition, sunlight and nighttime, all being equal and respectful of one another's space.... [We] humans would benefit more by being this respectful and accepting of the beauty of human diversity." And then together, when we also open up prayerfully and wisely to the Lord's infinite wisdom, soaking up the Lord's in-pouring wisdom and Light from Heaven, indeed as Jesus taught so very well, "Everything is possible for [those] who believe." (*Mark 9:23*)

Amen.