

“Great Lessons from Plants and Trees: Part 2”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scriptures

Leviticus 19:33-34

Mark 12:28-34

Hymns/Songs

“God of All People” 307

“Fill My Cup Lord” 604

“Lord of All Hopefulness”

Leviticus 19:33-34

³³ “And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. ³⁴ The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.”

Mark 12:28-34

The Great Commandment

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He answered them well, asked Him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “**The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.**” ³² And the scribe said to Him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other besides Him. ³³ And to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**” And after that no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

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

Insight for Worship

Secrets of Heaven 1032

[2] The Lord has mercy on the whole human race. He wants to save everyone in the entire world and to draw all people to himself. The Lord's mercy is infinite; it does not allow itself to be restricted to the few within the church but reaches out to everyone on the face of the earth. When people are born outside the church and as a result into ignorance about the faith, it is not their fault; besides which, failure to believe in the Lord because of a lack of knowledge about him never condemns anyone. What right-thinking person would ever assert that most of the human race will suffer eternal death because they were not born in Europe, whose population is relatively small? What right-thinking person would say that the Lord allowed such an immense number of people to be born in order to die an eternal death? This would be contrary to the divine nature and to mercy. What is more, people outside the church, called gentiles, live a much more ethical life than those inside the church and embrace teachings of the genuine faith much more easily.

SERMON: "Great Lessons from Plants and Trees: Part 2"

Last Sunday I shared with you my first segment of three sermons on "Great Lessons from Plants and Trees," and today I'm sharing part 2 of this amazing theme. I love that quote from the Huron Native American tribe I shared last Sunday, which calls us to live spiritually awakened lives that reads: "**Listen to the voice of nature, for it holds treasures for you.**" All of God's Creation is ripe with thousands of spiritual messages for helping us to live good lives of faithful kindness every day.

Allow me to use one of my favorite, small perennial flowering plants that is among the large variety of violets, given the adorable name of Pansies. First of all, to me it is a living miracle that out of one, small little seed grows a dainty, gorgeous little flower that seems to display a sweet little face looking back at me. I typically see two eyes and a mouth, some of which look a bit like a frown, yet still having fabulous beauty and an array of lovely colors. Often times when I look at them, I sense a message that tells me, that throughout my life...if I am open to the Lord's love and kindness...I will see and feel and experience ongoing beautiful thoughts and awareness that will give my heart little giggles of joy and delight, even though things like loss and grief at times come my way. And you know, it doesn't matter how many times I gaze into the face of a Pansy flower, it always tickles my soul, as if the Lord Himself is whispering sweet nothings into my mind, encouraging me saying, "Kit, no matter how difficult and painful life is sometimes, you can count on my Love causing new growth and wonders inside of you, just like this little Pansy flower depicts in physical form."

In what ways this past week have you felt and heard God whispering spiritual truths to you, if you remember to **“Listen to the voice of nature, [which] holds treasures for you”**?

Plants and trees are what they are (and they have the forms and characteristics they do) because they correspond to or symbolize the planting and germination of new, life-giving thoughts and ideas all of us can experience about the spiritual meaning and goodness of life rooted in God’s Spirit. And for anyone who chooses to follow the Lord’s ways, which we read about in *Leviticus 19* and in *Mark 12* as lessons for this morning, then gradually throughout our lifetime the Lord will mold and work us into His own image and likeness, enabling us to attain the peace and happiness we find pictured by Day Seven in God’s Creation Story, which was a day of rest from all labors.

The vegetable kingdom in general represents the beauty and splendor of life that is ripe with a mind full of the seeds of the truths that God’s Word provides. Try planting the seeds of truth from *Leviticus 19:34* into your heart’s deepest intentions whenever you encounter someone you do not know. Again it reads: **“The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself.”** This happened to me twice recently. Once was this past week, when a man who lives across the street from us where my family lives, who I watch now and then during the week through our windows—because his primary form of income derives from working on hand-pushed lawn mowers around our neighborhood. I’ve been curious about this man, who I’d say is in his early 60’s, who no matter how hot or humid our weather gets, he is outside working on lawn mowers. Well, as it happened, two weeks ago while I was weed eating and then mowing our front lawn at home, all of a sudden this gentleman approached me from in back of me, holding a little box of fruit. He spoke to me in a friendly way and offered them to my family, because as he said they were the sweetest Michigan peaches he’s ever tasted.

And you know what? He wasn’t kidding. I bit into one of them after my lawncare work was done and sure enough, those peaches were succulent, sweet and very juicy. They were like biting into Heaven in the form of a peach! But for me, what made them even better was the fact that this neighbor of mine took the time to walk over to me and share his bounty. I returned his kind gesture this past week, asking him if I could pay him to cut up a large, fallen tree limb that I needed to remove. But wouldn’t you know it, he and his friend who I spoke to several days ago wouldn’t take my money. They said, “Kit, hey...don’t worry about it. We got your back! We’ll have it taken care of in a jiffy...no big deal, man!” So you see, it was *Leviticus 19:34* sprouting up inside of us, while we cared about each other as a stranger “born among” us, caring for each other as we love and care for ourselves each day.

In conclusion, let me leave you with some fresh learning that plant botanists have discovered in recent years about the amazing world of plants that live all around us. Plants and trees form relationships with each other and with other forms of life—

such as insects, fungi or bacteria. Their relationships can be either collaborative or competitive. In other words, the neighbors of a plant or a tree can be either friend or foe. As Dr. Beronda Montgomery writes in her excellent book, *Lessons From Plants*, “By studying how plants interact with others, we can see the importance of establishing an ecosystem of support, collegiality, and community.” (pp. 50-51) Dr. Montgomery shares that she can see the wisdom of how plants often cooperate with each other and with other forms of life in her own work as a biochemist. Hence, by reaching out to other professionals outside of her own areas of focus, she and her other biochemist colleagues gain enormously from the strengths and insights of others. She and her colleagues have found that it is easy to run into the opposite mindset in our culture, which focuses only on individual success...rather than on mutual and communal success by way of embracing community diversity and collaboration, which the plant kingdom supports. Plants and trees work better and more thriving lives by using the network-based approach, with other plants, insects, fungi and bacteria. She writes, “They provide examples that we can apply to building and sustaining personal, professional, and learning collaborations (such as community gardens, community-based mentoring programs, and collaborative professional work), and they offer a salient demonstration of the power of diverse communities. The most effective networks,” Beronda writes, “are established and maintained by means of robust systems of communication and diverse interactions with collaborators and potential competitors.”

I believe that this is what our Lord Jesus Christ was pointing us toward, when He affirmed that the highest spiritual course we can take is to strive each day to love Him above all else and also to care lovingly and wisely for all of our neighbors as we do for ourselves. This is what I witness each time our church has a good rummage sale, and it is also what I am privileged to participate in within our new Faith & Community United group of churches and clergy who are working together collaboratively to help enhance our city community for everyone to enjoy. Both within us and around us, I believe that God is always inspiring us to cultivate gardens of love and goodness within our own mental processes, as well as within our many good relationships with the diverse people we live and work with, in our community. And I believe that we can experience this Heaven on Earth even more so, when we bear in mind the vision God gives us through the wisdom of His New Church, which says that we are serving a God who “has mercy [for] the whole human race. [For] He wants to save everyone in the entire world and to draw all people to Himself.” Amen.