

“Opening the Way for Peace and Trust In the Lord”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian

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Scriptures

Psalm 56:1-4

John 14:25-27

Hymns/Songs

“Breathe On Me, Breath of God” 603

“Break Thou The Bread” 101

“Guide Me Thou, O Great Redeemer” 950

Psalm 56:1-4

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me;

all day long an attacker oppresses me;

² my enemies trample on me all day long,

for many attack me proudly.

³ When I am afraid,

I put my trust in you.

⁴ In God, whose word I praise,

in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.

What can flesh do to me?

John 14:25-27

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

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

Insight for Worship

Divine Love and Wisdom 382 by Emanuel Swedenborg

“We cannot think at all without the concurrence and support of the breath of our lungs.

So, quiet thought is accompanied by quiet breathing, deep thought by deep breathing.

We hold and release our breath, we suppress or intensify our breathing, in response to

our thinking—in response, then, to the inflow of some feeling related to what we love, breathing slowly, rapidly, eagerly, gently, or intently.”

SERMON: “Paving the Way for Peace and Trust In the Lord”

Difficult and trying times may easily ignite feelings of worry, fear and anxiety. I remember recently when the price of gasoline hit \$5 per gallon, and I thought to myself, “Oh my gosh! We’ve been in a frightening pandemic for two years, and now this?! What else can go wrong in this life we’re all living on Earth?” Deep down, I felt afraid that the bad and hurtful forces of life were getting out of control. But then some days later, I chose to look at life at a much deeper level, using the great New Church theology we have been given, and I opened up prayerfully toward the Lord. Inside of my soul I looked upward toward the Lord our God and I asked Him to center my heart and mind on eternal truths, truths I have learned to trust very deeply, and I asked God, “Lord, I am afraid, and I feel like the darker forces of the hells are attacking me, pushing me to feel fear and anxiety. But, I trust in you, O Lord, for my life is in *your hands*, and my heart is stayed on you!”

And you know what? Just by taking a few moments to consciously open up my life before God and ask for His great, Divine help...I immediately began feeling a strong, warm and benevolent and presence surrounding me. And I felt steadied as well, because I was choosing to center my heart and mind on the holy Divine One, on the Lord, who is constant, eternal and always good.

Our world has been engulfed by a deadly and/or damaging new virus over these past two years, which caused an unprecedented shift and change to our everyday lives. Understandably many of us struggle with fear, anxiety, and panic, and sometimes it is hard to stop being anxious. You may have observed as I have, that fear and anxiety are even more “contagious” than viruses like Covid-19. And just like cold, flu and Covid-19 viruses, the spiritual forces inspiring fear and anxiety can make us emotionally and mentally miserable—even to the point of interfering with our work, our relationships, and our ability to get a good night’s sleep. And so, just as we need to learn and practice skills and habits to diminish the spread of the Coronavirus, we also need to learn and practice spiritual disciplines, habits and skills that mitigate or decrease the spread of anxiety and fear.

And so, let us look at three such skills that we all can incorporate easily each day, some you may already be doing, which help us to partner up with the Lord in calming our souls and deflating the spread of fear and anxiety within us.

1. BREATHING – train yourself to develop deeper breathing patterns each hour.

The word “breath” in the Bible symbolically stands for “spirit.” In the parable of Adam and Eve, it says that God breathed the breath of life into their human bodies, which He had formed out of clay and Adam became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). Another parable, which we find in the *Book of Ezekiel*, shows the people of Israel were depressed and lifeless because of living in captivity for many years. In Scripture they were compared to “**dead bones.**” And the Lord promised them, “**Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.**” (Ezekiel 37:5) This gift of life and spirit comes with breath because breathing is the basis for the thought of our spirit. Without breath we become unconscious, unable to think and unable to live. Because of this innate, organic connection between our thoughts and our breathing, we may find it easier to let go of fear and anxiety by calming and deepening our breathing, as well as by reaching down into deeper, calming thoughts centered in the Lord.

2. PRAYING FOR PEACE

Deeper levels of peace, the peace that comes from God’s Love and influence, are not dependent upon the cessation of war and lack of physical danger. Dangerous viruses may be able to hurt us physically. But, our deeper, spiritual connection with peace that surpasses understanding, depends upon our connection and openness to the Lord. Through prayer or talking with God, we are able to open up our hearts and minds to the Lord, so that spiritual peace may flow inside of us.

In Scripture we read: “**If I say, ‘My foot slips,’ Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.**” (*Psalms 94:18-19*) And in New Church theology we read: “**Peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end. When we have this faith, we have peace, for we then fear nothing, and no worry about things to come disquiets us.**” (*Secrets of Heaven 8455*)

3. RESIST ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

In *Matthew 5* the Lord tells us, “**Do not worry about your life**” and, “**seek first the kingdom of God,**” and “**do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.**” (Matthew 5:25-34)

Did you know that the command “**Do not be afraid**” occurs about 100 times in the Bible? It’s not there to make us worry about being anxious, but rather to reassure us and encourage us to make repeated efforts to let go of fear. It is repeated again and again because the Lord knows that we need that reassurance often. Thus, we can meditate upon Bible verses such as *Joshua 1:9*, “***Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.***”

It can be discouraging to send away anxious thoughts only to find yourself obsessing about them five minutes later. But the effort is not wasted. One reason why the Lord allows anxieties to pop up again and again is that each time we resist them our faith becomes a little stronger. Doing so repeatedly throughout our lives builds up a strong, “**muscular faith.**” And this is a very good strength to be sure.

In conclusion, I have heard some people say that it is unrealistic to think about eternal life when faced with real-world problems. But heavenly things are not a fairy-tale future, but rather they are the love, compassion, and integrity that are the most real part of our lives, and make it worth living. What is unrealistic is thinking that worry, fear, and anxiety can ever bring us enduring happiness. God is with us every moment of every day and night and He is our deepest source of happiness and peace. During our pandemic times, I pray that we will make use of the anxious and fearful thoughts we experience, and choose to focus on the Lord, His holy Word and ways, rather than what bad spirits are tempting us to embrace.

Amen.