

# **The New Church Newsletter**

## **Hurstville Society September 2011**

### **A Favourite Teaching - See The Good In Others!** **by Rev Glenn Alden**

Last month the favourite teaching was that people of all faiths can be saved. But just because that is a favourite teaching of mine does not mean that I am always prepared to see goodness in people who don't believe something that I believe.

The Writings of the New Church warn us that for most of us who are not yet regenerated, the natural reaction to people who believe differently than we do is to assume that the reason they believe differently is because on some level they are bad people who for that reason cannot be saved:

It is extremely common for us to form an opinion about some religious tenet and then judge that other people cannot be saved unless they believe what we do, even though the Lord forbade this: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7:1, 2). However, much experience has taught me that people of every religious persuasion are saved as long as they have acquired a remnant of virtue and seeming truth through a life of love for others. (Swedenborg, Secrets of Heaven 2284:4)

Observe your own thinking for a while and see if you too tend to impute negative motives to people who think differently from the way you do. I see this happening in political discussions all the time, even on television or other public forums. You might even hear a person use the word "evil" to describe the beliefs or thinking of someone on the other end of the political spectrum from themselves.

A favourite teaching of mine for this month is based on a little story, often overlooked, at the very end of the story of the flood. In Genesis:

Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked. (chapter 9:20-23 NIV)

Let's just have a quick look at the story itself. The Writings of the New Church tell us that Noah represents the early church, and on a personal level, an individual of the church. His becoming drunk represents the church itself, or the individuals who constitute the church, falling into doctrinal errors. (We don't think clearly when we are drunk). His being naked means that his position was basically indefensible. He had no truths from the Word to clothe his false thinking. Note that we don't know anything about Noah's drinking habits. Perhaps this is the very first time and last time this ever happens. The point is that we don't know Noah's motives or the state of his heart. We just know that he was drunk, and in the spiritual sense of the story it just means that he was in doctrinal error.

What happens next is very important. Ham, Noah's son, sees that his father is drunk and naked, and he goes out and tells his brothers! We can almost imagine

the glee Ham is feeling. Perhaps he covers the glee with indignation or moral outrage, but inwardly Ham is rejoicing at having discovered his father's weakness and in sharing it with others. We know from the context of the story, as well as from the revelation of the deeper meaning, that this is what is in Ham's heart.

His brothers, Shem and Japheth, are set by the story in direct contrast to Ham. For where Ham sees and immediately runs out to tell others; Shem and Japheth hear the news, take a garment, and hold it over their shoulders between themselves as they walk backwards into the tent. They do not want to see or to have others see. They take no delight in the errors or perversions of others.

The Writings discuss the deeper meaning of this whole story in great detail. They tell us that Shem and Japheth illustrated the way those who have charity, or love of the neighbour in themselves, act very differently than those with whom charity or neighbourly love is absent. These latter people are represented by Ham and his actions.

The passage goes on to describe how angels view the faults, errors, or even evils that less than angelic personalities might be inclined to observe in others:

"Those who are guided by kindness... hardly even notice evil in another but pay attention instead to everything good and true in the person. When they do find anything bad or false, they put a good interpretation on it. This is a characteristic of all angels-one they acquire from the Lord." (Swedenborg Secrets of Heaven # 1079:2)

I find this very inspiring. I would like to be a person who is willing to "hardly even notice the evil in others". I especially like the way they "put a good interpretation" on whatever they notice that is bad. I forget sometimes that this is a choice. I have a choice to make up either good or bad motives for anything that another person says or does. Truth be told, I do not know another person's motives. I might have some good grounds for thinking that another person's actions are from good or bad motives, but I can never know for sure. I realize that even with my own actions I often don't know for sure what my inner motive is. Am I thinking about what others think about me when I do something nice? Am I refraining from some evil act because I am afraid I will get caught and my reputation will be ruined? I don't always know for sure, and I have access to my inner thinking. I don't have access to another person's inner thinking, or even to what just happened to them earlier in the day.

Occasionally someone may cut me off or refuse to let me enter the flow of traffic ahead of them. I must admit that sometimes I tend to make up an evil motive for them in that moment. I tell myself they are self centred, thoughtless, bad people, (expletives deleted). I need to remind myself that I don't really know that. They might be distraught, frightened people who are rushing to the hospital because they just got a phone call that their child is in the emergency room. I could make up that story just as easily, and if I did my action would probably be different. I might let them enter the line of cars in front of me instead of thinking unkind thoughts. The only difference would be in the made up story I told myself. In the word of the passage I could "put a good interpretation" on their actions.

Angels (and those on earth who love their neighbour are angels inwardly even though they are still in the bodily world) think well of others. They take delight in seeing the goodness in others and intentionally avoid judging others to be evil.

I want to be that kind of person, and the first step is awareness that I have a choice. The second step is to "act as if" because the Lord wants me to act as if. I

can act as if I love my neighbour. I can choose to put a good interpretation on his actions. This might not change him, but it will certainly change me. It might even reduce the amount of road rage that happens around me. My kindness in traffic might engender kindness in someone else and like a line of dominoes falling, who knows where it might lead?

## **Courage by Mary Alden**

Several weeks ago fifteen people met in a suburban Sydney living room to begin a New Church Journey program entitled Living Courageously. I went to a couple of online sources to provide definition to the concept of courage.

In Wikipedia, courage "is the ability to confront fear, pain, danger, uncertainty, or intimidation. 'Physical courage' is courage in the face of physical pain, hardship, death, or threat of death, while 'moral courage' is the ability to act rightly in the face of popular opposition, shame, scandal, or discouragement."

Dictionary.com defines courage as "the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery."

I like the idea of a quality of mind or spirit that enables us to act or confront. Also valuable to think about is the ability to act rightly in the face of opposition. For me these concepts help to define what we are looking to do in a program such as this. What we are confronting is fear, pain, danger, difficulty, uncertainty, intimidation, shame, scandal, and discouragement. I don't personally agree that we do this without fear. Instead we choose to act in spite of the fear.

These are issues of our spirit. My spirit is subject to and has experienced fear, danger, discouragement and all the other things in between because I am human and have lived in the natural world as an adult for quite a few years. I am in fear when I face new situations, when I want to be successful and am not sure I will be, when I see my children facing job loss or alcoholism or even see them overspending. I am in danger when I indulge my lower nature by justifying the feeling of resentment against someone who has wronged me. I am in difficulty when I am unable to compel myself to act rightly. I am in uncertainty when I lose faith in the Lord to bring about a good outcome. I am intimidated by thoughts that tell me that there is danger in feeling positive about myself. You can imagine the rest of shame, scandal, and discouragement.

So how can the Journey program help us with all of this? First of all, I believe there is power in the ultimate collective of 15 people reading and studying together with the intention of trying to apply the same specific concepts from the Lord's Word to their lives at the same time. That these people are in a form of community together and can share their experiences adds to the power. When left to myself to ponder the difficulties of the issues of my spirit as outlined above, I can become very unbalanced. Like some interpretations in early Christianity, I can put on a hair shirt and think this solves the problem. Studying and discussing aloud with people helps to put things in perspective. We are on a journey together. Individually and collectively, we are not there yet, but God isn't finished with any of us either. We can afford to laugh at ourselves and with one another. We can see and appreciate what God is doing in our own life as well as in the lives of others. Learning truths from the Word, applying this through tasks or actions, and the sharing of experience give us inspiration and strength to go forward with courage. I am very grateful to be experiencing this program at this time and place.



that space from time to time and seem to delight in just being there. This is also where mating behaviour and mating take place.

We did not see the birds on that day, but Owen told us "They are not particularly shy though the female is more shy than the male. One day I actually saw both the male and the female tending the bower together - a picture of domestic bliss!"

They do not nest in the bower. The nest is built somewhere nearby. It appears that this bower is a permanent structure in the bird's minds, something which they return to over the years.

I was reminded of the way everything in nature provides inspiring images of things that are important to our spiritual life. I suppose I find the bowerbird so delightful because like him I need to create a space for love in my marriage. Thanks for the reminder to be loving, little Bowerbird!

"The whole natural order is a theatre representative of the Lord's kingdom in heaven, and therefore of the Lord's kingdom on earth, which is the Church, and consequently of the Lord's kingdom with every regenerate person." Emanuel Swedenborg "Arcana Coelestia" # 3518

### **Aspiration A Poem by Norman Heldon**

Be like the lyrebird; as I long  
For tranquil scenes, like that cover,  
Bracken around and great gums over,  
Where on his earthen mounds  
He mimics passing sounds,  
Drenching the gullies with song.

Be like the eagle; to belong  
In lofty fields, like those sublime  
Sky ranges, on cloud mountains climb,  
Where along aerial ways  
Lordly he soaring strays  
Seeing, but lacking in song.

Ah, sage and singer! Eagle-wise  
To Heaven mount, where such a bliss  
Of celestial strains the senses kiss;  
Lifting the mimic art,  
Stirring the eagle heart -  
Between worlds yet stronger ties!

### **Services and Classes for September**

Services each Sunday at 10 am as usual with the following topics

Sept 4th Path of Life  
Sept 11th Saved from What  
Sept 18th Conscience  
Sept 25th Powerlessness

The Living Courageously discussion groups will continue each Monday night at 8pm on 5th and 12th at the home of Hailing Sun Cooper with the final evening being held at Baringa at 7pm on 19th September. Note that on the final night there will be a dinner before the discussion group to celebrate the completion of the series.

### News Notes

Congratulations to Rev Julian and Ruth Duckworth on chalking up 20 years service to the church in Australia. A dinner to mark this occasion was held on Saturday 27th August in the Roseville church hall. Julian and Ruth's contribution to the church in Australia cannot be underestimated and extends far beyond their own society. The Hurstville Society would like to record their deep appreciation of their help and friendship especially at times when we have not had a pastor.

Rev Glenn and Mary Alden who have been enthusiastically serving the Hurstville Society since they arrived just over a month ago will be doing some travelling in the next couple of months. First up they will be away from 6th to 10th September visiting the Barrier Reef. Then they will visit Perth over the second weekend of October before spending the last two weeks of October in New Zealand.

### Birthdays

Happy Birthday to Owen Heldon (6th), Carolyn Heldon (8th), Klaire Horner (9th) Sylvia Hicks & Karen Evans (13th), Jeffrey Heldon & Phillipa Horner (15th), Emily Warne (26th) and Phillip Walsh (29th)

### September 2011 Calendar of Events

Note: All events are located at the church at 22 Dudley St, Penshurst 2222 (off Hillcrest Ave) unless otherwise stated. Contact the Hurstville New Church on (02) 9580 1589 for more information or email us at [newchurch@optusnet.com.au](mailto:newchurch@optusnet.com.au) All are welcome and refreshments are served after church each Sunday.

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<b>Sunday</b>	4th September	10 00 a.m. Worship
<b>Monday</b>	5th September	8 pm Living Courageously (see Newsletter)
<b>Sunday</b>	11th September	10 00 a.m. Worship
<b>Monday</b>	12th September	8 pm Living Courageously (see Newsletter)
<b>Sunday</b>	18th September	10 00 a.m. Worship
<b>Monday</b>	19th September	7 pm Living Courageously (see Newsletter) Note change of time and venue
<b>Sunday</b>	25th September	10 00 a.m. Worship