

Candela



Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JUNE 2024

ISSUE 116



Here we are with the winter issue of the Candela and we are sure you will gain and get pleasure from everything in it. Happy reading.

Recently, when we were overseas, we were in Iceland, and we went to visit one of the natural waterspouts, a 'geyser', that erupts regularly from under the ground where the pressure of the water builds up until it breaks through the surface. It forms a shooting column of water about fifty metres high, which then subsides when the pressure is released, only to form again about three and a half minutes later.

This is its endless rhythm - flow, restriction, pressure, breakthrough,

release, subside, flow. Ever repeating. A perpetual cycle. Such rhythms are all around us in nature and the universe.

Day and night with the seasons bringing swings of less and more, the ocean tides, phases of the moon, sun and rain, sunlight and shadow, life, birth, growth, death, decay, new life.

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Please note: the views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the S.A.A. or its committee.

Next Issue – September 2024

I hope you find some helpful articles in this Candela. Our next edition will be in September. Please send any articles to me by August 18th.

Email to ruth@duckworth.me or post to the registered office.

Ruth



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Membership of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc. is open to anyone who wishes to pursue an interest in Swedenborg, the man, his science and his spiritual teachings.

For details on how to join, call (02) 9416 2812 or browse <https://swedenborg.com.au/contact/>

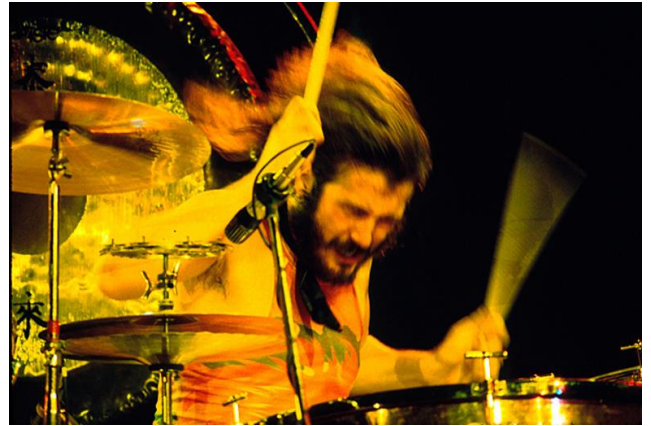
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Rhythms are there inside us as well, with our heartbeat, pulse places, ear drum and vibration, gut peristalsis, menstruation, cell replacement, and these are only some of the physical ones. On the practical level, there's our routines, On the emotional level, there are repeating mood swings, elation, feeling flat, renewal. On the mental level, there are insights and epiphanies, light dawning after focus and contemplation. On the spiritual level, there are the basic patterns such as: My whole being is given to me by God yet it must feel as though it is all mine. Then the 3 Rs of repentance, reformation and regeneration which are certainly not a spiritual university course but the endlessly re-occurring sequence of our spiritual journey.

I'm a lifelong musician of 72 years of playing, and rhythm - the beat, pulse, and

tempo - is an integral part of any music from Telemann to Taylor Swift. Of course, melody and harmony are upfront, but you would never go to a rock concert or an orchestra where the rhythm is not being kept going by the band drummer or the



timpani section. Rhythm underlies everything. You can often identify a piece of music just from its beat. Try and work this one out: Diddle di, diddle di, diddle di - di - di. (Answer later).

So, when we turn to Swedenborg, what kinds of rhythms do we discover in his spiritual teachings? Quite a few. One well-known one is the spiritual picture of the morning, noon, and evening leading to the new morning. "Night" seems not to be heavenly but descriptive of hell. This does not mean that those in heaven never sleep or rest, just that they are never in the dark.



Morning is a personal state of intention, to be of service and use. Noon is the period of being fully occupied in whatever angelic usefulness you can give. Evening is after this when you come from that activity and into more of yourself, with the delight of having done things but also the possible twilight-thought, "I did today pretty well..." leading to a sense of wanting to focus and rejoice in God in and from whom all good comes. And because of that, it's the morning and the sunrise.



Another rhythm comes in what is called our circle of life. We come to know a truth, which leads to us understanding it, which leads to us willing it, which leads to us doing it. This is the rhythm of spiritual practice. And in Arcana Coelestia/Secrets of Heaven 1648, Swedenborg says that the very way in which angels speak is in a rhythmic pattern, showing the connections, the meaning, the purpose and the conclusion.

One of my favourite rhythms is called "the truth-good inversion" but I prefer to call it the "flip-over". Basically it is that we first start by seeking and coming to know what is true because this leads us to what is good. When this is part of us, there is an important 'flip' where our primary love is now for what is good, and this leads us to appreciate and see what is true, because it is the good of God.

Enjoy all your rhythms because they work well for us and they bring a pulse into the movement of our days.

And, before I forget, that piece given only rhythmically is the "William Tell Overture", by Rossini.

Happy days,

Julian

Have you remembered to renew your SAA membership?
It helps us pay to promote the writings of Swedenborg and to develop new ways of presenting them. It also pays for production of the Candela!

For details of how to join call (02) 9416 2812
Or email saa@swedenborg.com.au



Welcome to Vicky Karmogianni from NSW who has become a member.

2025 Retreat at Stanwell Tops

Thurs 2nd to Monday 6th January

Would you like to spend a long weekend in a beautiful setting where you will have time to hear more about putting the writings of Swedenborg to practical use in your life? You would be very welcome.



Prices (all per person)

* Adult twin with ensuite \$490.00.

Adult shared \$450.00

* Pensioner twin with ensuite \$470.00.

Pensioner shared \$420.00

Linen hire (per set) \$17.00 sheet set, pillow case, towel.

Day visitor Adult (no meals) \$17.00.

(1 main meal, 2 supplements) \$37.00



For bookings

Email: nciaretrear@gmail.com for more information.

Payment to: The New Church In Australia
BSB - 012 003

ACCOUNT - 2264 17589

Please write name & retreat in comments.

\$100 deposit please.

Scan for information on
The Tops Centre.





Virtues – Patience

By Darren Brunne

Virtues are the essence of our character. Practicing virtues can help open our life to new possibilities and greater joy and fulfillment.

Patience is the power of quiet and unassuming faith filled with hope coming from deep within to strengthen one's resolve. This virtue comes to our aid when we are directly under a burden and seeking the Lord's power to continue until we experience victory. Human nature seeks pleasure and avoids pain. Our instinct when we are carrying a burden is to flee to "greener pastures". However, when the Lord so desires, much richness and fulfillment can come by enduring the right kind of burdens through the power of patience.



The word *patience* (or steadfastness) in the New Testament comes from the Greek *hypo*, meaning *under*, and the verb *meno*, meaning *to abide*. *Hypomeneo*, therefore means to have patience while *abiding under* a burden. When we learn to abide in the Lord while under a burden, we will be victorious.

Patience

Definition

- the ability to withstand hardship or adversity especially: the ability to sustain a prolonged stressful effort or activity
- the ability to undergo an unpleasant or difficult process or situation without giving way

Synonyms – ability, capacity, courage, fortitude, grit, mettle, patience, perseverance,

persistence, stamina, strength, tenacity, tolerance, vitality.

Antonyms – cessation, close, discontinuance, discontinuity, end, ending, expiration, finish, stoppage, surcease, termination.

Quotes

Despite your best efforts, people are going to be hurt when it's time for them to be hurt.

- **Haruki Murakami, Norwegian Wood**

So comes snow after fire, and even dragons have their endings."

- **J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit**

This too shall pass.

- **Hakim Sanai**

At the end of the day it's about how much you can bear; how much you can endure. Being together, we harm nobody; being apart, we extinguish ourselves.

- **Tabitha Suzuma, Forbidden**

No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father... in heaven."

- **Orson F. Whitney**

Scriptural Quotes

Lk 8:15

As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Rom 2:7

...to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life...

Col 1:11

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

Rev 3:10

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

**W.I.N.** Wisdom integrated Neurobiology

Be sensitive to your environment and look for opportunities to be a more patient person. When you catch yourself being frustrated, irritable, or short-tempered, do not be hard on yourself. Instead, make adjustments to your attitude which reflect a greater level of tolerance and understanding.

**T.A.M.E. Your Life**

Take a moment examining your life.

Think about how *patience* makes for peace and smoother living with others. Where could you exercise more patience and thus improve life for you family, friends and work colleagues?

**Thoughts to meditate on**

My thoughts are filled with hope and reassurance.

I trust in the Lord's Goodness and that it always leads to an end filled with life.

I learn from my adversities and discover new wisdom.

When situations are beyond my control, I look to the Lord for His intervention.

I treat others with mercy and grace even as I wish to be treated.

Prayer

I am thankful Lord, for Your gift of patience. It strengthens my resolve while developing my character and allows me to become who you intended me to be.



Positives and Negatives

By Julian Duckworth



While positives and negatives might remind us of electrical charges, car batteries and perhaps the north and south poles on a magnet, they are, for us human beings, very characteristic of our experiences, moods and situations on a regularly daily or even momentary basis. We're up - we're down. We were up yesterday, and today something's up so we're down...but for some reason I feel a bit better now. We sometimes call these mood swings. If they become extreme, then we should give them attention and maybe seek help.

A friend of my dad's had a wife of many years who for so much of her life had been hit with six month-long depressions every year, for half of the year! When she was around 65, a consultant told her that she didn't have enough zinc and told her to get some. Result? No more long-term depression. In hindsight, it's such a very tragic story.



But our changing moods, however and whatever they bring on, are our spiritual states. They are there in all of us and it doesn't matter what trace element, childhood deprivation, genetic hand down or sudden disaster may have come our way, we human beings have times when life is sweet and feels so good, and other

times when we feel things are stacked against us or that inside us it's a bit of a hole.

To put it in religious words, feeling great is 'heaven', and feeling lousy (or whatever word you'd use) is hell. But it is just not as simple as that. If we think that heaven is when everything is going well for us and in us, we might imagine that if we can only keep everything feeling great we can 'stay in heaven'. Try that sometime...! What will you turn to next to just keep the lovely feeling there?

Conversely, if we find we're in regular bad places and we can't account for that, we will probably think we are just not trying hard enough or that we have failed somehow, all of which will dig us deeper in our hole. We are deeply misreading what is going on, as we will come to see a bit later on.

Let's look at a four-part diagram mentioning different positives and negatives:

Positive positives	Negative negatives
Positive negatives	Negative positives

First, notice the difference coming through each of the four categories: The first two, going across, have a lined-up sameness. The second two, underneath, are giving an idea that some negatives are or can be positive, and that some positives are or can be negative. How on earth can a negative be a positive negative, or vice versa?

Now, if you feel you can, see if you can come up with something - anything - which strikes you or is there in your own experience as being what each of these four are talking about. Or maybe just one of them. Do NOT worry if you can't or if you need some more explaining.



We will pick up on these four later on. As the recipe says, take it off the heat and put it aside for the moment. Let's go on to clear up some informed spiritual realities and some points that Swedenborg's spiritual ideas present us with.

Let's begin with God. God is the source of life and of everything. God's purpose and activity never changes. His one goal is to lead us from hell and bring us to heaven. That goal is there in the eternal living of our life and it is there, equally, in each moment-by-moment state we are in. God is consistent, endlessly loving, infinitely wise, and ever-bent on our well-being. Within all of those, there is so much more detail about what God does, can do and cannot do or will not do. We will never fathom God on that detail level, although we can muse and wonder. It's best with God for us to work from those sweepingly true statements.

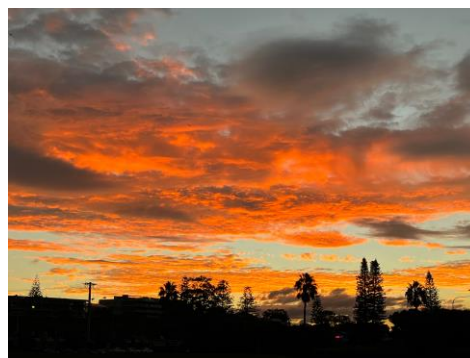
The Love of God by Sabrina J. Squires



Now to us. Here's an essential fact. We are created, by God. We are being created and kept in our createdness all the time. We are ... a 'product' (if you can cope with such an idea!) Now let's add some more facts. We have a very strong experience that our life is our very own. Our impression is exactly that and our physical senses, especially seeing, keeps on reinforcing that this is the case. Every moment is the same impression for us, so that we have (all of us) moments where we have to remind ourselves there's God, or that

we've not thought about God at all for three and a half days.

We also live in a world which looks like it is self-existing: Sun shines, water runs, plants grow, day and night, and all the rest of nature, and it looks very much like it is all running by itself. We can



certainly see that it looks that way. But if you look all over nature with some sense and idea of God too, then

nature opens up a new vista and you begin to be able to relate everything to a personal connection and meaning. Let's just take one example, that of clouds. Clouds bring rain and water. Hey, that's a positive. Clouds often cover the sun and on some days we can't see sun anywhere. That looks like a negative. Clouds often provide us with a gorgeous sunset, full of colour, another positive. Dark clouds will sometimes bring on a storm and that's dangerous, and negative.

Now relate all those to ourselves and our experiences and states. Rain is like a diffuse blessing all over our life, here, there, everywhere, soaking into us, making us content and right. That's a restorative feeling. God blesses us, but not only in this. Clouds covering the sun take us visually away from seeing the sun (which is the spiritual sun, God) so that we miss it and look forward to it reappearing. It's very helpful for us to be without the direct sense of God so that we can go looking and finding, and also remembering that the sun is way up there all the time above the clouds. The gorgeous red and orange sunsets are like God's whole glory which we witness at the end of the day, when we have lived and done things but now give them over to God.



The storm is perhaps the hardest event to link with God, and we shouldn't make light of any adversity. Yet it is very true that it is struggle and crisis that teach us, deepen us, strengthen us, and make us more aware. For many, it brings God more personally to them. Living indulgently does not do these things for us. Pleasures are definitely not wrong but they can distract us from feeling and understanding the depths of human life - think empathy - and of the infinite love and wisdom of God.

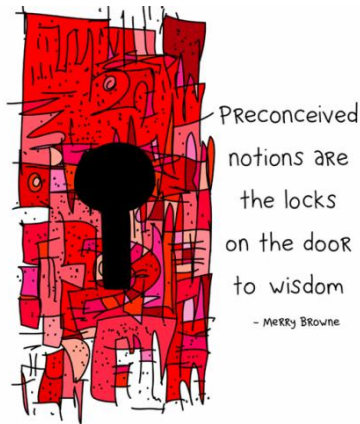
So now let's go back to our "four part diagram". Take another look at it. Hopefully, things will come up for you which maybe weren't there before. We'll give one example for each of the four and you can come up with any others as you notice them in your mind.

Finding a positive positive: I'd say that the idea of ourself as an intended person with a rightful place and usefulness in life is always a very positive view to have and keep there. Each of us is completely valid. In God's terms (and God brought us into being), we are meant to be who we are in the whole scheme, here and for ever after. God carries the whole creation out in all its complexity. God fully knows our place in this and God loves us individually as if he only had each one of us to love. That is a great positive-positive for us!

Finding a negative negative: For this one I'd pick what I will call " 'nothing-but' ism" and I'll explain what I mean. If you say about anything or anyone that it is nothing but this or that then you are reducing it or writing it off. For example, you might say that your neighbour is nothing but trouble because you've had two run-ins with them. Think about that... You have no idea what other things your neighbour may do. You've given your neighbour a final label. You haven't considered whether your neighbour might have issues about you. And golly, if you start telling others that your neighbour is nothing but..... then take care for your own soul.

There are many other ways of summing things up nothing-but-ingly. Life, kindness, purpose, meaning, marriage, trust, you name it... and it's a weary black hole to nowhere which feeds on itself.

Tip... never agree with anyone who uses the phrase!



Now we come to the mixtures...

Finding a positive negative: The idea about this one is that there are many things which look tough, wrong, hard, bad, but they can bring up or bring about something that would otherwise have never happened. A blessing in disguise, a hindsight that we can see led us where we are now. Or we can look at some difficult issue we're involved in and find a possible benefit from its present stresses.



The common idea about temptations or spiritual trials is that "they come to test us". I don't agree with that at all, because I don't think either God or Life is out to see if we are up to survive things. I would much rather see any problem as something which will equip us and make us wiser and stronger, and importantly, more aware.

Finding a negative positive: For this one, which may be the hardest to get our head around, I will choose the idea of the 'quick fix'. This is the idea that one thing will put everything right, and all you have



to do is to commit, get one, stick with it, and life will be wonderful. I don't have any problem with quick fixes for bathroom tiled floors but I do for happiness, kindness, understanding and most of all spiritual life and growth. These are subtle and slow growing, and they depend on us taking responsibility.

It can come into religion with ideas of assured salvation, wiped-clean absolution, church-going, even money, but when it comes into God, it becomes serious. I've been told that when we die, God welcomes us from this hard life and from now on, it's pure bliss. And I've been told that since it's God who regenerates us, we don't have to do anything. These were told me in all seriousness. The pull of the quick fix.



At this point, it is important to say that Swedenborg describes how we are not the origin of our thoughts and emotions, but that these - both positive and negative - come into us from the spiritual world where heaven's angels look for uplift, empathy, use and innocence and hell's devils look for weakness, lusts, deception and anguish. And we're in the middle and both will feed us with what we turn towards. And what we turn towards is our responsibility.

Here, to end with, is a quote from Swedenborg comparing what is affirmative and what is negative. It's from Secrets of Heaven 2338, 2568, 2588

"Trials bring with them doubt about the Lord's presence and mercy and about salvation. The evil spirits who are then present with us, who bring on the crisis, inspire strong negativity. Good spirits and angels, however, on behalf of the Lord, use every method they can to do away with this doubt, keep hope always alive in us, and eventually reinforce a positive outlook. As a consequence, we hover between denial and affirmation during our inward struggles. When we fail, we continue to doubt, and sink into pessimism. When we win, on the other

hand, we do still have doubts, but those of us who allow hope to set us on our feet stay optimistic.



"There are two principles. One leads to complete folly and insanity; the other, to all understanding and wisdom. The first is to deny everything. It is to say in our hearts, 'I can't believe these things until I am convinced of them by what I can understand or sense.' This is the principle that leads to complete folly and insanity, and it should be called the negative principle. The other is to affirm the teachings of doctrine that come from the Word, or to think and believe inside oneself that they are true because the Lord has said so. This is the principle that leads to all understanding and wisdom, and it should be called the affirmative principle."

"People whose attitude is negative toward the idea that everything in the Word is true say in their hearts, 'When reason and fact persuade me, then I am willing to believe.' Their plight is that they never come to believe, not even if the evidence itself of their physical senses' sight, hearing, and touch convinces them. They are always coming up with new opposing arguments, until in the end they completely snuff out any spark of faith. At the same time they blot out the light of reason, turning it into darkness by falsifying it.

"On the other hand, people whose attitude is affirmative believe a thing to be true because the Lord has said it. Their situation is one in which logic, fact, and even the evidence of the senses are always confirming their belief and lending light and strength to their ideas. It is only by means of reason and fact that we receive light; everyone relies on these. In the positive people, then, theology 'surely lives,' and they are said to be 'cured' and 'bear children'. In the negative people, theology 'surely dies,' and it is said of them that their 'womb is tightly closed.'"

And these two opposing approaches, positive and negative, can be equally well seen in many other spiritual areas and the attitudes that people adopt.



PARABLES

By Christopher V. A. Hasler

Without a parable he told them nothing. Matthew 13:34

It is one of our human characteristics that we learn the principles of truth better by listening to a story, myths, fairy-tales and singing, or watching drama and dancing. Some of these can be quite frightening at times, but they make us think and reflect on the lessons we have absorbed almost subconsciously.

It is no use enjoying the story or the spectacle unless we are changed by it in some way, so that it leaves a mark on us. Suppose that I could present to you a great religious drama by Javanese shadow puppets in which a prince longs to marry a beautiful princess, but in order to win her, he has to battle against dragons, monsters and demons, always encouraged by a spirit of light. You might enjoy the drama, but its purpose would be to strengthen in you the belief that honesty and purity are a match against any evil forces that may try to prevent you from reaching heaven – the final wedding of love and truth. And then there are the biblical parables. Why are they so important? Partly because they stand apart from the historical and prophetic texts, and so cannot be challenged as not being 'true historical accounts'.

Does it matter if the Lord was talking about one particular sower, householder, king or king's son? Not in the least! We can forget textual criticism, dating, and similar hurdles of the scholar. We know that the purpose of every parable is to give us a message, which shines with new light on our life. We can think of each parable as a drama in which the Lord introduces us to the belief that heaven is on our side, even if the way is hard and we often seem to be alone. Several times the Lord uses the theme of a king, or a wealthy householder who has to travel far away and leaves his steward or servants fully responsible for his treasury and estate. Some of these stories get quite complicated and the

financial arrangements and rewards would send our financiers and bankers screaming. Think about the master paying all the workers the same wages—however long they worked: a Trade Union nightmare!

Let us focus on a short parable (Mark 13. 32-37). It is one of a series of parables about servants and stewards who were left



on their own to administer the estate and wealth of their master. He has to go away for an indefinite period, but it is understood that he may return at any time and then will ask for an account and see how faithfully each discharged

his duty. Whether you own a house, or rent one, or are responsible for looking after one, makes no difference, because that is not the subject of the parables. They, like fairy-tales and fables, speak about universal fears, about courage and loyalty, and about good and evil. They talk about principles, not objects.

In one sense we all dwell in an estate, which does not fully belong to us. I mean the estate of our body of which we administer only a very small part, and that does not include the life-force over which we have no control whatever. This estate can be taken away at a moment's notice, so that its material structure returns into simple elements and can be recycled for further use.

But even that is not the real estate the Lord had in mind, for he always elevates us to higher things: things, which are invisible, intangible. So much so, that someone might say, "Well then, it can't be real, if I can't see it or touch it!" The cynic and materialist can easily ridicule religious concepts, but can he tell us what reality is?

Are our belongings more real than our feelings, thoughts and memories? Are they more real than our mind or the relationship



we have with those we love, just because we can hold them.

And yet,
it is our mind,
our very self,
which the Lord is
talking about



when he mentions the estate over which we must watch, because we have been given authority and handed a number of duties which occupy our every day. Some of them are quite menial, repetitive, others are more interesting and challenging. But all need to be fulfilled.

And yet this story is as much about the Lord and his Providence as it is about us. Especially so, in those times in our life when we are left apparently to our own devices, e.g. responsibility for our family and in our work. Then there are those periods when we are in despair—when we have news of serious illness, be it our own, or someone close to us. “Why have I got this terrible affliction?” or “She is such a lovely person, why is she suffering so much?” We seem to be alone with the news, not knowing where to turn, what to do. Should we be quietly resigned? Is this the Lord’s will? Does he care what is happening? “Will I ever come out of this, and feel free and happy again?”

The Lord certainly is like a man travelling to a far country. The parable seems to cut deeper and deeper into our pain and anxiety. He has gone to a very far country! So far, that when I want to reach him, I can’t. Why does he let me experience such pain, confusion and fear? He is well and truly away and all I am left with is his instruction, “You have a job to do, then get on with it!” There seems to be no escape, the demands are piling on from the absentee Landlord. Perhaps now we can understand what the man felt when he said?

Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown seed. And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, here is what is yours.
Matthew 25. 25

Religious people in a crisis do ask themselves if the effort they are called to

make is really worth it. Some quietly drop the standing charge of responsibilities. “I just don’t need all the hustle, I can’t cope.” Does the Lord provide some little ray of hope, some relief? It is there, if we can notice it. It is enshrined in the command to the doorkeeper: “To watch!” In the Bible, the doorkeeper is usually treated with some respect:

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
Psalm 84. 10

The doorkeeper is in a very strategic position. He decides who will come in, and who or what will be kept out. It is a position of great responsibility. The door-keeper within us, is our prudence, our sense of responsibility and freedom, which the Lord has placed in us. It is our right to admit or to reject, our power to judge between good and evil. We need to be left seemingly alone if we develop and reach maturity. We must decide which way we wish to go, and what we want to worship. Most readers of the Gospels will have their own favourite parable or two, because we find them vivid and easy to remember, but above all the Lord’s own voice seems so close to us, because they seem so genuine and unchanged from the beginning. We also remember that, “*Without a parable he told them nothing.*” Matthew 13.34. There was always something more to be extracted from each phrase, from each word which touches the hearer or reader quite personally and powerfully.

In John’s Gospel, there is that lovely chapter about the Good Shepherd. It is in chapter 10. It is in a way also a parable, since the Lord never was a Shepherd, and we are not sheep. Yet the image enshrines such lovely principles, so that it is a dearly loved part of the Scriptures. If we read the chapter with care, we shall realise that the Lord is not only the Good Shepherd, he is also the sheepfold, the door of the sheep as well as the doorkeeper and the voice, which calls every sheep by name. Notice: he is the true Doorkeeper. It is because of him that we can feel free and safe within the sheepfold of our mind. We can graze and have the ability to go in and out, because we are protected. He above all is the one who constantly watches over us. Those moments when the Lord is



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

To become a member of the Swedenborg Association of Australia, check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au and click "Contact" in the top menu, which has details on benefits of **membership** and an application form listing current membership rates.

Also check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au for details of **group events** which are held online, but you can also be physically at various locations around Australia. Follow the "about → contact" menu items on the website for a list of locations and contact info of your nearest group convenor, and see the "events" menu item for Zoom links so you can join online events.

Our new website is continually being updated with new study material and latest news and information.

away, and we are struggling alone are apparent only. We could not live or move without his constant presence, nor indeed could we ever decide to choose right over wrong unless he upheld us.

Therefore this power and responsibility of being a vigilant doorkeeper of our inner life is underpinned by his presence. Every aspect of our life, of our freedom, is only due to that love which is ready to lay down his life for us.

The parables are therefore a rich source of wonderful material, each full of deeper meaning. For example, the Pearl of Great Price in Matthew 13.45 may on the surface look like a story about an obsessive art collector, who would give anything to have the best. But if we realise that the Lord is talking about spiritual riches, above all, about our faith, then in order to attain the highest and the best, we need to sell everything else that we have collected so far. We should not settle for the second best.

I already referred to the Trade Union Nightmare Parable in which the Lord engages labourers at any time of the day, but pays them the same wage. Matthew 20.1-16. Never mind our sense of right and wrong in such financial transactions, but what does it show us about our Lord's attitude towards us? Is it not clear that he desires that all of us should have something useful to do? He seems to abhor idleness. Secondly, every effort we make is of equal value in his eyes. This is wonderful to know at those times when we are perhaps utterly weak or incapacitated and our contribution can only be very small.

Then of course, the chief of all the parables: The Sower which appears in three of the Gospels and is explained. No, Jesus was not holding an Adult Educational Class for local farmers, telling them what they already knew. He was talking about inner realities: the Word, the mind hardened by long habits, the trials and dangers every believer meets. In short, about our attitudes and our reception of his Word. Unfortunately, in spite of the Lord's explanation, this parable has been misapplied, and preachers have used it to divide people in 'Us and Them'. Us, the good people sitting in churches and Them, those who never come through our doors. But the Lord also told us not to judge others, because in the end, we can only judge ourselves, since we do not see into the minds and motives of other people.



Let us assume that the parable of the Sower is telling us something about ourselves. Is it not correct, that there are some of the Lord's teachings I am not yet prepared to consider at all? Are there not others I have received with great enthusiasm, but soon lost interest? Are there not some with which I have struggled, but in the end had to admit defeat? The worldly pressures proved too much. But hopefully, there are, some truths in my life, which have born wonderful fruit of love and sympathy and sharing. It is the first principle of interpretation of the parables that we do not apply their first obvious lesson to others, but look at the underlying meaning, which can help us to grow into those who have "ears to hear". What they hear is the Lord's concern for their eternal welfare and his desire to lead them into the kingdom of heaven.