

***Theme:** Those experiences of being humbled are the ones that teach us the most about ourselves. They can be embarrassing and uncomfortable, but they can be used by the Lord, who loves us, to grow us into truth beyond what we know now.*

**Hosea 11:1-11**

**Luke 12:13-21**

**“Humbling Experiences”**

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**Hosea 11:1-11**

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.

**Luke 12:13-21**

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

## **Swedenborg**

'Let no one leave any of it until the morning' means that they must not be anxious to acquire it of themselves. This is clear from the fact that the manna was given every morning and that worms bred in what was left over, meaning that the Lord provides people's requirements every day and that for this reason they ought not to be anxious to acquire them of themselves. The same thing is meant by daily bread in the Lord's Prayer and also by the Lord's words in Matthew,

Do not be anxious for your soul, what you are going to eat or what you are going to drink, nor for your body, what you are going to put on. Why be anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they do not toil, nor do they spin. Do not therefore be anxious... (Matt. 6:25-end).

Similar words occur in Luke (12:11, 12, 22-31). *Arcana Celestia* #8478

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There have been events in my life that I don't like to remember because they were embarrassing when they happened, and cause me to squirm even now.  
- late 20's/early 30's in OR, playing 2<sup>nd</sup> base in game at Mt. Vernon on Dayville town slow-pitch softball team – 3 errors. Redemption - 1 triple, too late in the game to mean much of anything – and I think the centerfielder kind of gave up on the ball anyway because his team was so far ahead.

There have been times in my adult life when I was a complete beginner, and was therefore dependent upon others for a lot.  
- Learning how to buck up fallen trees for firewood. Not physically strong. There was a church member/farmhand who knew how to do that, plus who had a pickup truck and chainsaw to cut the trees down in the first place. I bought a maul, which looks like an axe but which has a thick cutting head with a broad and blunt edge, and which I used to break up the rounds into wedges that would fit into our wood stove.  
- Teaching at Zephyr Point a couple of weeks ago– ministry stories great, but technical lecture knowledge needs work. Felt like a beginner. I don't like that feeling. I want to be in control, knowing what/when/where/how/what, and especially why.

There have been times in my life when my hidden anxieties made themselves known quite graphically and unforgettably.  
- Preaching dreams – I'm talking perfect sense from the pulpit, but people are getting up from the pews and leaving by the back door.

And there have been times in my life when I realized that I had to deal with the limits of my emotional competence, get in touch with the deeper parts of me,

and learn new emotional skills.

- a few times in my work with churches when I lost my temper in meetings because I took things too personally and failed to see the larger picture. Feeling overwhelmed/unskilled/incompetent in stressful situations is meant to direct us back to the Lord, who created us, loves us unconditionally, holds us tenderly, and goes with us from where we happen to be toward that place of mind and heart where we can be of greater use.

When I remember those truths, I feel calmer; the Lord is present, and there is hope. There is grace. Truth is mixed with love, and I know that I will, if I pay attention, gain wisdom.

"The Guest House" – Rumi

This being human is a guest house  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

(Coleman Barks translation)

The ancient readers of the prophet Hosea's book knew their own shortcomings as God's people, individually and in the corporate sense. The images of caring parent and wayward child struck home for them, and they knew that they could indeed be childish, immature, unknowing, unconscious. They knew there was a long way to go toward maturity, truth, love, awareness.

And they turned toward the One who created the heavens and the earth, called their ancestor Abraham, and brought them out of Egypt toward the promised land. They understood that they could fall back into old behaviors, as though returning into bondage in Egypt.

This realization humbled them. Their pride and self-satisfaction were replaced by humility. They knew that they had become overly comfortable with the way

things were, they had become too self-important. If they were to be used by the Lord, those attitudes had to be replaced by something resembling reality.

Recently a few of you have mentioned the word 'humility', 'humbled', or a variant of those words in relationship to yourselves as a congregation. Why? Well, because the best candidate for the position of minister of this church, who was elected by an overwhelming majority of those present, decided that he could not come here. That was a shock to you, and yes, to me as well.

It is a difficult thing for a church to be rejected by its chosen candidate. Let me tell you that it does happen to churches here and there. Now it has happened to you.

What a few of you are saying, quietly, is that this congregation needs to learn humility. My translation of that, based upon my time with you, is that now some of you see that perhaps you were too proud, too 'special'. You assumed that of course ministers would fall over themselves in a rush to apply to this church, and that, of course, the one you called to be your next minister would say 'yes'.

Well, some did apply, and the one you chose said 'no'. After a little while, the search will begin again. And perhaps some of you are left wondering just what the heck is going on; or feeling sad, or disturbed, or angry, or maybe even relieved because you did not approve of either of the final two candidates; and that is where you are, and the Lord knows that, and is present with you in the midst as a mother caring for her child.

So here I am, on the first day of the last month of my time with you, beginning to say goodbye, and the one thing I do not want to do is beat you up and leave you bleeding. That would be a violation of our relationship, and a violation of the good news of the Lord's love. I want to leave here naming what we have experienced together, with a mutual sense of accomplishment. All of us have come a long way. We have learned a lot about ourselves. The Lord is not done with us; there is more in the Lord's providence yet to be revealed. And so we go to the Lord in our hearts as the process of regeneration (sanctification) continues.

For today it is enough, I think, given the need to start somewhere as we begin this last month together, that we root ourselves firmly in the good grace, love, and truth of the Lord who brought us unexpectedly together for this time, and who has seen us through to this point.

We have lived  
through heated disagreements and gentle conversations;  
through worship and classes;  
through Council and congregational meetings;

through congregational gatherings convened for the purpose of telling the stories of this church's history and discerning their meaning;  
seminars brought by Swedenborgian theologians;  
coffee hours and silent meditation;  
through people leaving temporarily or for good;  
through people discovering this congregation and becoming members;  
through disappointment and anxiety and impatience, as well as through the sharing of deep wisdom, laughter, prayer, and eating and working together;  
through uncertainty and risk-taking, and vacillation, and frustration, and deep healing peace.

I believe the Lord brought us together for a reason, or for many reasons. We need to grow up a little more. We need to be stretched in our awareness – of theological truths, of alternatives to the ways we have always done things, of what it means to be in community. This time has not been easy, but it has been rich, and full. It has been a time for asking questions; for experimenting a little with worship; for seeking the core values of this congregation; for identifying the use/purpose/calling of this congregation in the world.

I invite each of you, over the next weeks, to think about our time together. Ask these questions of yourself:

- What have I personally learned from this time?
- What is the Lord's purpose for this congregation?
- How am I willing to contribute to this community of faith as it goes forward without a full time called pastor for a number of months?

Remember the Lord's words in the prophet's book: "My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord."

Swedenborg wrote, 'Peace has in it trust in the Lord, that He governs all things, provides all things, and leads to a good end.' ~~Arcana Coelestia #8455, Emanuel Swedenborg

May it be so. Amen.