

The Dress Rehearsal

By Alex Lindsay
Sermon of May 28, 2006 to parishioners of
The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco on retreat

"Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." -- Matthew 6:19-21

People will tell you "Life is not a dress rehearsal" but, if we believe what the Lord tells us, one could argue that this is a dress rehearsal. You could argue that what we call Earth is nothing more than a playground for you and I to find out who we are and develop ourselves not as human beings but spiritual beings. The game on this playground is not who can collect the most fame, fortune or love but rather who can accumulate treasures in heaven which are measured in good deeds produced with good intentions that serve the Lord through our fellow neighbors.

Heaven is not a reward for this service...it's simply a collection of those who have proven themselves the Lord's servants. It's a collection of those who saw themselves as an expression of His love here on earth. Hell is not a punishment for selfishness, it's a collection of those who want to do it their own way, who centered their life on themselves instead of others and simply continue to do so in the other world.

So what does knowing this mean? Well, in many ways it simplifies our lives. Being part of a heavenly society doesn't require nearly as much work as being part of High Society. A heavenly society doesn't care about your car, or your clothes, and or where you kids are going to college. It doesn't care about how much you know, how you look, or if you made millions in the dot com bubble. Instead, those in a heavenly society value how you manage your spiritual life and how you serve the Lord through service to your neighbor.

Now you may notice that I'm saying "Heavenly Society" instead of "The Lord wants you to do this..." of course, the Lord wants you to do these things but not as a king to his servants but as a coach to his players. I don't think of my obedience as being about subservience but rather about expression with a direction that is eternal. An obedient player follows their coach because they realize they don't see the whole picture and, at the same time, want to express their skills in their individual position to their fullest and to the benefit of the team. A good coach gives the guidance they need and like a conductor, orchestrates something bigger than they could produce on their own.

What you have in God is the ultimate coach rooting for you and giving you all the tips you need to succeed. You could think of the Ten Commandments as not laws...they are good coaching...the first four are really all about you and your relationship to your high coach...

- 1) Don't take any other gods...I'm the architect, I created all this. If you are talking to a golden calf...I can tell you...no one's listening.
- 2) Don't take my name in vain. I'm on your side, I'm ready to be there when you call me...but if you call me every time you're angry, surprised or stub your toe...it's going to be as effective.
- 3) Honor the Sabbath...for one day a week you need to remind yourself that you are a spiritual being in a natural world...and not a natural being waiting to go to the spiritual world. It's very easy to become immersed in this world...take a day to re-center yourself.
- 4) Honor your parents...If you don't complete your relationship with your parents...it will be hard to move forward. They hold many of the keys to your success.

The next four are about your neighbors...don't kill them, don't steal from them, don't sleep with their spouse, don't lie about them...In the country, we say that good fences make good neighbors...these are the spiritual fences that make good spiritual neighbors.

The last commandments, don't covet thy neighbors wife, maidservant, manservant, ox, ass, car, cell phone or Prada bag. The bottom line is...don't get caught up with the Jones! What's important is how you are being right now and *that* can be done any where in any situation, at any time. Spiritually, there's no where to go or to get to...there is only using what is here to find ourselves and purify ourselves as expressions of God.

As we develop our self image as spiritual beings we cease to see death as any sort of ending at all. Our life in this natural world is simply a time for us to define who we are spiritually. It's a game that we play where winning is mostly learning not to play most of the games that are popular and focusing on a handful of games that are useful. It is played with faith...not faith alone but faith that things are happening the way they should and are part of the game.

Of course, winning this game it is not about working hard for a reward in the next life. The rewards of this game in this world look like fulfillment and full self expression. Fulfillment is a result of realizing that you need very little and it is easy to find and generally all around you. Self expression sourced out of a spiritual center, not our natural wants and needs.

It also leads to incredible power for when we realize that our natural life is insignificant (and we make this more apparent as we develop our spiritual being), we have access to approaching the natural life's challenges without many of the fears that we have when we view ourselves only as natural beings. We're not worried about how we look, what people will think, and no one can put a "gun to our head" with any sort of effectiveness. Spiritual development is not just about working hard for future returns...it's true freedom right now.

In Japanese ancient culture, it is said that the samurai enter the battle in their minds already dead. That by dying mentally before the battle, they were able to act with no-mind...but as a singular expression of excellence with no fear for the small self – this clod of muscle and bone. In our own lives, maybe we need to die mentally...to release our attachment to this natural body in order to fully express our spiritual nature. This doesn't mean ignoring our natural life for it is the vehicle for spiritual development. It is the game piece. The key, though, is to realize that the game can end and be won or lost at any moment because it is a state of being...not an aggregation of points.

The Question for you is, Can you stand in the face of life's challenges or even death with calmness and possibly even excitement knowing that this is part of the game and that the best is yet to come, or would you sacrifice your soul to save this fleshy machine that is only there to serve it?