

Plant That! Seeding Inspiration and Community

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The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

Inspiration: The Divine flowing (to breathe into) in through me and me allowing the influx to bring me to and into community. To join with others – which is to seek and see the Lord in each that I meet.

I hoped that by titling my message Plant That! Today that I'd get your attention. When I dreamt up the phrase, it was for another purpose. I never imagined that it would be printed in the church bulletin as the title of the "sermon." Life is full of surprises, eh?

Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. I love this verse from Jeremiah, our first reading. Just one line and it says so much. In Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, A garden corresponds to the intelligence and wisdom of heaven; . . . and the good works done by men are compared to fruits.

Today I'm going to talk about **inspiration, community and gardens**. I am inspired. I feel inspired – perhaps you do too. It's easy to feel inspired in this beautiful place, our church. As you may know, the word, inspire, comes from the Latin, *inspirare*, which means "to breathe or blow into." Another way of speaking about the Lord's influx – how the Divine breathes her love and wisdom into us.

And that is my hope for you today too. I hope that if you don't already feel inspired that you will by the time I'm done up here. However, I do promise to stop talking when my time is up whether I see inspiration on your faces or not.

On May 15th this year I read about a remarkable woman called Tessie Ester who is a long-time resident of Bayview Hunter's Point here in the City. For almost a century, the PG&E plant in the neighborhood – one of the poorest, most neglected parts of the City - had been spewing toxic pollutants into the air, driving the community into a protracted battle to shut it down. One of the clues that it was so toxic was the high rate of cancer and asthma for the residents there. For ten years, Tessie along with Greenaction, the environmental advocacy group, battled to close the plant down. On May 15th, -- the fourth anniversary of my father's death from cancer - it happened – our heroine, Tessie and others had the PG&E facility closed!

This story inspired me. I thought of David and Goliath, I thought of Erin Brokovich - and I was inspired to call Tessie and offer to provide a celebration outing for her and her group of mothers and children. She didn't call me back for quite a while and during this time my imagination took off. Instead of simply taking everyone out for a day, I imagined planting trees! I imagined lots of trees in Bayview – especially in the spot where the old power plant was. In Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, trees correspond to the perceptions and knowledges of good and truth which are the source of intelligence and wisdom - so I thought how right that they be planted to flourish and heal the earth and residents alike in this blighted neighborhood. That idea then *blossomed* into a garden. How much more fecund that might be. . . That is, a garden would give rise to more . . . more community, more growth, more opportunity for friendships to be made and deepen as adults and kids worked and played there together.

Tessie later returned my call. And the meeting was just as I imagined it to be – she was dynamic, passionate, loving and full of fighting spirit. She talked a mile a minute and told me about all her community involvement. She whole-heartedly welcomed the garden idea. She is full of love for her community and I would say she has genius too.

That is, genius as defined by this quote from Mozart – he said, "Neither imagination nor intellect, nor both together go to the making of genius. Love, love, love—this is the soul of genius." – Mozart

This woman has a lot of love to give – and give it she does. She's the leader of the Tenants Union, she chairs the Mother's Committee for Health and Environmental Justice, operates the food pantry and frequently takes the children on outings to parks and museums. Hearing Tessie speak about her

community got me thinking - what this word community means – and what it means to me. How do I commune? Commune – to join together as one. I think we can all agree that we experience communion through our relationships with friends and loved ones. Whether it's in the bonding that happens in deep and open conversation – or the talking and listening that can occur in prayer, shared joy at a good (or even bad) joke, when we connect with a child in play, -- so many opportunities to feel at one with another. These, I think, are the times when we feel most happy. These are the times when we feel no separation – through this merging, this communion, conversely we feel most fully ourselves. Still our own individual selves yet so close to another that we feel unity or at-one-ment (which also means reconciliation). If you break that word down into three parts, we have at-one-ment. (And I hope this doesn't sound like an English lesson!) So, another way to interpret atoning is to rejoin, to return.

The communion I seek as I think most people do is a return to the Divine (although they may not frame it that way), to be in community with that which is Greater than myself. That communion is accessible for me in an immediate and deeply satisfying way through nature. Walking in the woods, on the hilltops or by the ocean. I stop often and look, smell and listen to all the earthly beauty which is a reflection of the spiritual world. And, here, I have to tell you – I'm not just a tree-hugger, I am a tree-kisser!

Working in my own garden or walking in the West of Ireland as I did on my recent vacation, I lose myself. I see the Creator's touch in the tiny wildflowers growing through rough stony soil – what a metaphor that is. In the Burren in County Clare, there is a vast area covered my huge slabs of rock – unlike any other lush green area of the Emerald Isle. The most delicate looking tiny wildflowers find a way to reach deep down into the soil to root there and then send their tender stems up to reach the light in between the cracks – what a triumph! I think of Tessie and others and their determination – what a triumph.

This peace and connection I experience in nature, I know is experienced by others too. Now with this community garden we have the opportunity to plant the possibility of connection, enriched well-being, usefulness, fun and beauty. Through community we're invited to enlarge our worlds, lose ourselves, and in so doing – come closer to the Divine.

Before you leave the sanctuary, I invite you to take out the tags that are in your bulletins, take a moment to imagine the Community Garden – think of it as a metaphor for our World. This world in which we can create heaven on earth, where heaven already is. Think about what you want to plant in our Community (either physically as in the kinds of plants or the things that you believe will help create heaven on earth – love, friendliness, patience, etc.). Write that down and give them to me after the service and we can take your energy and ideas to nourish the Community Garden.

I'll end here with a quote because you do all look inspired! From Kierkegaard:

If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And, what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating as possibility.

Please join me after the service at 12:30 - bring your tea or coffee and we can gather for a short time in the fireside room to hear more about the garden – the intoxicating possibility.

First Reading

Jeremiah 29:5

Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.

Second reading

Bette Mc Donnell

In the Garden

Out here, under the sky of a late Autumn evening
With the sea a soft not-too-far-off murmur
I tilt my head to earth's unbounded roof and see
The stars—the light of the eyes of all the souls in heaven—
Showering their tenderness down upon us,
Across all the pasts of heavy burdens of shared memories.

Not forgetting the gifts those burdens give still,
I hear them whisper in the alive stillness of the night,
 If you want, if you want, if you want,
 Give and give and give, and in giving,
 Receive and receive and receive the present of today
When they brought me here to know You
And come again to love.

Swedenborg Quote

Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, n. 87-99, 110,111.

The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, and not merely the natural world in general, but also every particular of it; and as a consequence every thing in the natural world that springs from the spiritual world is called a correspondent.

A garden corresponds to the intelligence and wisdom of heaven; and for this reason heaven is called the Garden of God, and Paradise; and men call it the heavenly paradise.

Trees, according to their species, correspond to the perceptions and knowledges of good and truth which are the source of intelligence and wisdom. For this reason the ancient people, who were acquainted with correspondences, held their sacred worship in groves; and for the same reason trees are mentioned in the Word, and heaven, the church, and man are compared to them; as the vine, the olive, the cedar, and others, and the good works done by men are compared to fruits.

Also the food derived from trees, and more especially from the grain harvests of the field, corresponds to affections for good and truth, because these affections feed the spiritual life, as the food of the earth does the natural life; and bread from grain, in a general sense, because it is the food that specially sustains life, and because it stands for all food, corresponds to an affection for all good. It is on account of this correspondence that the Lord calls Himself the bread of life.