

**“Let Everything That Breathes Praise the Lord!”**  
**Sermon of July 17, 2005 to the Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco by Eric Hoffman**

OT: Psalm 81

NT: Revelation 19:1-8

There once was a man named Archimedes. He lived over two hundred years before Jesus came into the world. Archimedes was a scientist, educated in the finest universities of Egypt (which was the academic capital of the western world back then), and he had a love for intellectual challenges. One day, the king of Sicily approached him, and said, “Archimedes, I have a problem. A week ago, I gave an artist a small chest of gold and asked him to make me the finest crown the civilized world has ever seen. Yesterday, he gave me this fine headpiece. But I suspect this artist may have cheated me. I suspect he may have made me a crown that is gold on the outside, but lead within, keeping the excess gold for himself. How can I find out what this crown is made of, without cutting into it and marring its beauty?”

Archimedes knew that simply weighing the crown wouldn't solve the problem because a crown made with gold and a crown made with a little lead would weigh pretty much the same. In fact, this puzzle so confounded Archimedes that he did what many of us would do to help him think—he went to take a bath. As he lowered himself into the bathtub, he noticed the water spill over the edge—the more of Archimedes that was submerged, the more water that overflowed. He thought, “If I were completely submerged, then the weight of all the water that spilled out of the tub would equal the force that helps me to float.” And then the answer to the puzzle suddenly struck him! “If we submerged this crown,” he thought, “we could tell if it had lead in it by weighing the water it displaced!” It would work because although lead and gold have similar weight, they have different densities and so there would be a difference in the water.

In fact the answer to the problem filled Archimedes with such joy, that he ran out into the crowded street yelling, “Eureka! I have found the answer!” He was completely oblivious to the fact that he had forgotten to put clothes on!

I have always thought that this was a wonderful story—not so much for the comedic ending or the fact that it was a turning point in the history of science—but because of the joy. Archimedes wrestled with a challenge and arrived at a solution, and that was cause for celebration. As I grow older and as I strive to live my life deliberately, I find that moments in which I arrive at solutions to life's challenges are coming more frequently, and I'm also becoming more aware that each one is a reason to celebrate. I don't mean to say that I have a cupcake every time I solve a problem, but that these days resolving issues elicits a sense of joy in me. Most of the time, it's a very low-key kind of joy, but sometimes it's a “Eureka!”

Have you ever been so happy that you could not contain yourself? The joy was so great inside you that you could not prevent it from leaking out somehow? I'm thinking everyone here probably has. Think back in your past to the happiest Christmas Season you ever had. Now Christmas Eve to a child is about the most wonderful thing to behold, because it is a time of anticipation and excitement that something wonderful is close at hand. I remember, back in junior high school, our band would go to Kin's Island Amusement Park at the end of the season. For a couple of weeks before the trip we couldn't get King's Island out of our heads! The very thought that something wonderful is so close causes an intense feeling of joy to start deep within your soul. Pretty soon, it starts to well up into your face and in the muscles of your shoulders, and if you don't express it somehow, all the pressure of this happiness just bursts out of us! It's a feeling that makes you grin and then laugh, and if all the happiness still isn't being dispelled, there may even be a little dance of excitement involved—some sort of movement that will give expression to this joy that will not be denied. Just last week I was driving down the highway listening to the radio after a long, hard day. One of my favorite songs started to play: *“I can't fight this feeling/deep inside of me...”* and I just couldn't help it. I started to sing at the top of my lungs and dance from the waist up! I'm sure some of the other drivers thought I had gone off the deep end, but, you know, it just didn't matter. This is a contagious joy. Those of us who have

been children know this feeling, and anyone who has ever watched a child try to contain the excitement that Christmas stirs knows that it touches a familiar chord in the adult heart so that we can't help but smile.

When you add to this outburst of joy the realization that God is moving through you, and that joy flows from God continuously, the expression of it becomes *praise*. Examples of praise are so numerous in the biblical story that we have to acknowledge its importance. When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea and knew they were finally free of Egypt's influence, their joy was so great that they played music and sang songs and danced. When Mary met with Elizabeth, she praised God at the prosperity she then recognized, saying, "My soul declares the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God" for all the wonderful things that God has done. Zechariah was moved to speak overwhelming praises to God for what was sure to be ahead for the human race. Later, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the praises and exuberance of the people were so great that the priests warned Jesus to quiet them, but Jesus told them that the great joy that heaven has come was so intense that even if every human tongue was silent, the rocks and stones would sing out-because all of creation is filled with happiness and excitement!

Praise is an indispensable part of the spiritual life and we have known it forever. The Hebrews had a word they used whenever praise needed to be expressed: HALLELUJAH! Which is actually, in effect, an abbreviation for HALLELU JAHUEH "Praise God." And a hallelujah isn't just any acknowledgment of God, but it's a feeling that starts deep inside and grows. The word is spoken with heartfelt joy, and it is spoken with the acknowledgment that there are no words to adequately express this feeling, this devotion and this love for all creation. So we know that when the angels were singing when the Lord had been born, "Hallelujah! Glory to God in the highest heaven," those weren't just words they were reading off some script. Those words of praise came from their inmost heart and were sung out with every fiber of their being!

Let us try to do likewise right now. Now I know that this is a Swedenborgian Church, and Swedenborgians tend to be very astute listeners during most sermons, so I'm asking you to loosen up a little. After everything I say, let's fill this church with an hallelujah:

1. It's a beautiful summer!
2. We just experienced an awesome Convention!
3. After all that planning and preparation, Convention is over!
4. Right now, somewhere, there is a child who is being embraced!
5. Right now, somewhere, there is a child who is being fed!
6. Right now, somewhere, there is a child who is playing in safety!
7. There is, as we speak, a national effort underway to establish a Department of Peace!

How does that feel? Can you feel that release of joy? And could you feel it build as we went along? Can you feel how much more excitement and electricity there is in this room than there was 15 - 20 minutes ago? Praise is a wonderful thing for several reasons. It passes from one person to another like a candle flame, and it's a necessary part of the spiritual life for this reason: *Praise begets Peace*. Swedenborg wrote that God has no need of praise.<sup>1</sup> God can run the universe just fine without our constant vocal support, thank you very much. What God needs is for us to live a life of charity and to grow into a spiritual maturity that fuels a life of use, and that's what praise is for. When all the laughing and dancing and singing is done, and with every "hallelujah" that is spoken from within, we are left with a sense that the act of giving our joy expression has brought us more into harmony with creation. And the peace that is born of praise is a peace that will open us to receive the Lord's guidance and the love and wisdom that is always flowing into our spirits. In other words, this is a peace that will help us to know what we

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<sup>1</sup> *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 456

have to do, in ourselves and in our world, to foster the state of heaven, which is our goal. Praise begets the peace we need to attain in order to perceive the divine, and to know innately that God has been with us all along.

Although there is much in this world that tends to make us forget to express our inner joy and gratitude, praise begets the peace that will help us to cope. Let us never lose sight of that child within us that needs to express the excitement that life offers. The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah reads, in part:

*Sing praises to the Lord,  
for God has done gloriously  
Let this be known in all the earth.  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel.*