



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society August 2020

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Imagine

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

There's an old song by John Lennon that asks us to "imagine." There are many things he asks us to imagine... no countries, no possessions, and yes, no religion too. I have a hard time imagining these things because I think at a fundamental level having countries and religions make sense, and even possessions make some sense on a practical level. However, when I let my mind drift off and imagine a different world, the world I imagine is one where no one is afraid to die. I'm not talking about some sort of crazy macho warrior type of fearlessness, but a care-free look at death because we know, not just believe, but really know that there is an afterlife awaiting us.

I came across a Ted talk on YouTube by Thomas Fleischmann, titled: From life to death, beyond and back. He's a paramedic. At the outset of the video he lays out four basic ways in which people die, and that he's been at the side of a person when they died around 2,000 times. So he's seen death a time or two. He also says that paramedics can bring a person back from death about 7% of the time, and that 20% of these report having had post-death experiences after he's resuscitated them. If you do the math, that means he's heard first hand NDE accounts from about 30 people.

If you've done any sort of study into NDEs, he really doesn't tell us anything that we don't already know. He says the person dies, and then pain, anxiety, fear and noise are all gone. They usually know that they've died, and yet there is no anxiety around that fact. There's only peace and joy. People will see the paramedics working on them, which in his light-hearted humorous way he describes as "annoying," because there's no scientific explanation for this since these people have no brain function and therefore you can't create memories if the brain isn't functioning! I appreciate his logic here.

He then says that 98% of reported NDEs are positive, with only 2% reporting a negative experience. However many of the negative experiences turn positive. Of the 98%, there is no link to any particular personality traits. He says, "If we could show that Catholics have good experiences, Protestants don't, we'd have billions for our research!" He's probably right about that.

It's at this point that I start to imagine. If we take Fleischmann's statistics, and extrapolate them across dying people around the world, you would come up with a flood of near death experience stories. And they're basically all positive. I imagine people really starting to believe, and I wonder about all the ways in which their life would change for the better if they really did believe in these tales of the afterlife.

I actually don't have to use my imagination too much to figure out how our lives might be different if we did believe. Fleischmann and others note that people who have an NDE come back and show profound personality changes, and the world would be a better place if we all exhibited these personality changes. NDE'ers are more empathic, more socially oriented, they lose interest in material values and become more "spiritual" though not

necessarily more religious. While all of those changes sound great, I really like to imagine what the world would be like if we abandoned materialistic pursuits.

But there's one other change NDE'ers have: they completely and totally lose their fear of death. When I catch the news, every day the main headline is how many people have died from COVID-19. They really like to play up the US numbers because they're big. But what if we just didn't care? What if instead of saying "126 people in Australia died of COVID-19," we said it more like, "126 people got to go to heaven a bit early! Lucky folks! We'll miss them, but we're happy for them." We wouldn't have to worry about a stressed out health care system. People wouldn't be living in fear about getting the virus. How many people work hard to bring heaven on Earth, yearn for a utopian existence here, and yet are afraid to die and actually experience the utopia they crave?

Now, I would bet that some of you might be thinking, "I'm not afraid to die, but I just don't want to die just yet!" I get that, quite honestly that's where I am too. I'm not ready to go just yet. But I do trust the Lord, so if I do go, I can trust that He's got everything under control both for me and those who I leave behind. No stress, no drama, no worries. Imagine that.

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The Continued Adventures of Glenn & Mary Alden

The Aldens apparently don't know how to actually retire... or maybe they're actually the best at retirement that we've ever seen. Glenn retired from full time pastoral work about a decade ago, but then came to serve Hurstville for a while to help out while the Beiswengers awaited their visas. As Australians know, this wasn't the last rodeo for the Aldens, as they ended up serving in Brisbane, and eventually in Melbourne too. Well, they've now embarked on their latest tour, this time in South Africa.

Essentially what has happened is that the pastor, Rev Mark Allais, who was in Buccleuch was called to serve at the Carmel church in Kitchener Canada. Buccleuch didn't have an assistant, and they were unable to find somebody to fill the post on a permanent basis, so who steps in? Glenn and Mary of course! There's been delays in actually getting them to Buccleuch what with all the virus stuff, but they have been engaging with the congregation digitally, which is the way of the world these days.

Anyway, I just wanted to provide you with that update lest you think the Adventurous Aldens have actually really retired. They haven't. I don't suspect they ever will.

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A Coronavirus Story

I expect that you're familiar with the premise of the 60s TV show "Gilligan's Island." They set out on a three hour tour, but hit some bad weather and were shipwrecked on a deserted island for years. My friend **Joel Brown** could tell a similar tale. I've known Joel most of my life. He's a few years older, but as kids he lived only a few doors down the street. Our fathers both worked out of McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey USA and

flew the C-141 together. Joel was a high school basketball star, and also my basketball coach.

For the past few years he's been working in Beijing as a teacher, and in January he came to Australia for a two-week holiday. He contacted me to catch up since he was going to be in Sydney for part of the time. At the same time the coronavirus stuff was all happening in China, and I offered to him that if he wanted to extend his stay in Australia to stay clear of the chaos there, he was welcome to crash in our spare bedroom. He accepted. Not long later the school announced they would do online classes, so it made everything work for him to stay here.

Then China closed their borders. He's not a Chinese citizen, so now he couldn't go back, and nobody knew when the border would open. Next thing you know it was the middle of April and his Australian visa was expiring, so he applied for an extension. It took two months to get an answer, but eventually they agreed that he could stay until end of December. Now he's off to Cairns to spend some time in a warmer part of the country, but in the end he may very well end up staying in Australia for nearly a year. Not bad for a two week holiday.

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Spring Women's Weekend - Update

You may recall reading an enthusiastic invitation to participate in our upcoming wonderful women's weekend, scheduled for mid-October? We're no less enthusiastic but deciding to be more pragmatic about it: rather than gather *en masse* to share our thoughts, friendship and germs we will instead work towards possibly having smaller get-togethers and definitely online sharing of thoughts and friendship minus the germs. If you're interested in joining us or learning more about this event, please drop Jenn a line (jenn@beiswenger.net). We hope to 'see' you then!

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Working Bees, etc.

Since this newsletter will come out on the same day as our quarterly working bee we aren't able to provide an actual write-up of it here, but it would likely go something like this: 'Many thanks to everyone who came out and lent a hand in our working bee on Sunday! Many weeds were pulled, green bins were filled and the church gardens were once again spruced up. Although there aren't many of us available to pitch in, in our small community, every little bit helps. While our crystal ball is foggy and we can't predict that this will *actually* be the outcome of our working bee, past events are the best predictors of future events, so it's quite probable that this synopsis rings true. In all sincerity, thank you very much to all who did help out, and particularly to those who help out regularly and continuously -- with gardening, Sunday School, flowers, music, dinners, newsletters, finances, property management and the like. We really couldn't do it without you. Thank you!!

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The New “New Church” YouTube Channel

A few months ago the GC Office of Outreach decided to start a channel on YouTube, and it is appropriately titled “New Church.” At this point they’re running two different types of content, one is designed to be short chapel/church talks, and the other is a series titled, “Big Spiritual Questions.” Hurstville folks may remember a few years ago that **Luke David** spent a few months here as a college intern, and now he’s a big part of this project working as their camera man, video editor and comment responder.

For the chapel talks they’ve enlisted a number of pastors around to pitch in and take a turn at it, which of course lightens the load for those involved, but also provides for a variety of voices for those watching. I was invited to participate, but declined since I’m busy enough with my own YouTube project. So far their viewership for these videos is small, with most of them getting 50-100 views, which is similar to what I’m seeing with the live-streamed services here.

With the “Big Spiritual Questions” series they’ve gone a different route. They pose a question such as, “What Happens When We Die,” and have four Bryn Athyn based pastors weigh in on the question. With these videos they have been doing some aggressive promotion as well, getting them 150,000+ views on three of the videos in this series. As you can imagine, I watch this project with great interest, looking to see what they get right and what works well. If you want to check it out, the easiest way to find it is to go to www.newchurch.org, and if you scroll down the page you’ll see thumbnails and links to some of their videos.

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Permanent Freedom from Evil and Falsity

by Bill Hall

Long time readers will recognize the name “Bill Hall,” and may remember that he passed away a few years ago. However, before he passed on he had sent in a couple articles that were never published. I hope you enjoy this entry from an old friend. – Todd

“If man believed as the case really is, then evil would not be appropriated to him, but good from the Lord would be appropriated to him; for then, immediately when evil flows in, he would think that it was from evil spirits with him, and when he thought about this angels would avert and reject it. For the influx of angels is into that which a man knows and believes and not into what man does not and does not believe” (Divine Providence 320).

When man knows these truths and live by them throughout his waking consciousness, he experiences a wonderful new sense of freedom from feeling dominated by evil influx into his heart and mind. Truly, he is lifted to a new state of consciousness that enables him to live as the Lord would have him live.

Instead of reacting negatively to an influx of evil, instead the angels with him direct his thinking to the reception of good and truth from heaven. Truly a limiting and narrow

perception is lifted from his life and he experiences an uplifting perspective of living as the Lord would have him live throughout his waking consciousness.

As we go forward every day, let us rejoice from the heart that the Lord has provided us with his dynamic truth to enable us to be continually directed toward living as the angels of heaven live, forever free from sorrow, regret, self pity, and above all, freedom from care of the morrow.

“Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

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Why Did You Spill the Coffee?

This was shared on Facebook by Margaret Ward, and I thought that I'd share it here – Todd

You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and bumps into you or shakes your arm, making you spill your coffee everywhere. Why did you spill the coffee?

“Because somebody bumped into me!”

Wrong answer. You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup. Had there been tea in the cup, you would have spilled tea. Whatever is inside the cup is what will spill out. Therefore when life comes along and shakes you – which WILL happen – whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it, until you get rattled.

So we have to ask ourselves, “What's in my cup?” When life gets tough, what spills over? Joy, gratefulness, peace and humility? Or Anger, bitterness, harsh words and reactions? Life provides the cup, YOU choose how to fill it. Today let's work towards filling our cups with gratitude, forgiveness, joy, words of affirmation, kindness, gentleness and love for others.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Emily Kermond** (7th), **Rhonda Hall** (12th), **Rebekah Horner** (17th), **Larah Walsh** (21st), **Ralph Horner** (30th)

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