



## **The New Church Newsletter**

**Hurstville Society September 2020**

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## What Are Your COVID Blessings?

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

How do your conversations go these days? I had a chat this week with a person who I hadn't talked to in a couple months, and it was good to catch up. However, one thing I noticed is that the conversation seemed to parallel most of my other conversations. They go something like this:

"Hey, good to see you!" or "Hey, thanks for calling!"

"What's new, how ya been?" I say.

They reply, "I'm getting really tired of this craziness..." and then the real complaining begins. Some complain because they have to wear a mask, some complain because others aren't wearing a mask, but just about everybody complains about being tired of the government restrictions because we're at a point where there really isn't any end in sight. You can count me in that group. Which of course leads to the other universal complaint: I didn't get to make the trip I was planning and I'm still waiting on the refund. Yep me too. Plus my go kart racing season has been cancelled! Boo! So believe me, I'm well versed when it comes to Corona-Complaining.

But you know we shouldn't be like this. The Bible is full of stories where things go bad only for them to come good. The Lord tells us over and over to just be patient and it will turn out fine. Jesus is pretty clear on it: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

The Old Testament stories give us fodder for this as well. I think about Joseph, whose brothers "socially distanced" themselves from him. He probably didn't much like that. Then he was put into stage 3 lockdown at Potiphar's house. Though like many of us, he did seem to enjoy working from home. But when that came to an end he was quarantined in the local prison... and you can imagine that there was no end in sight for that problem. Not even any hope of a vaccine to return life to normal.

Life never did return to the way things were for Joseph. Life didn't return to normal for Moses after he went into exile into the desert. No more Egyptian cafes for him. People used to jump when he said "jump" as an Egyptian prince. Now he's stuck with this whiny nation of people who complain every time they have to do something. I guess he got to travel though. But life never was the same again. David was a farm boy, slays Goliath, and then had to socially distance himself from a jealous Saul... but when things finally settled down, things were different, but they were also better.

I know people have been resisting this, but maybe we need to start thinking that way: life isn't going to be the same. It's going to be better. Different for sure, but better. God's still in charge, right? That's a rhetorical question. He is. Always has been. Always will.

I've been thinking a lot about this "new normal" in terms of our church. For the past few years it seems that our weekly attendance is around 15-20 people. However, since returning from the lockdown at the end of May, it's been more like 8-12. But on the live-stream side of things we've seen a big increase. It was 5-10 who would watch within 24 hours of the "broadcast," but now it's more like 30-50, with some additional views throughout the week. So even if the church building itself is feeling more and more empty, the reality is that the church is reaching more people. Maybe that's a new normal for us, and maybe it's not a bad thing.

I've seen blessings in my personal life. I didn't go on that round-the-world trip, so I've actually saved some money. Some of it I've spent on radio controlled trucks and planes, and have spent many hours driving and flying them with Zach. It's been really good that we've found something that we both enjoy. While it isn't a visit to Paris, it's just going around to different local parks, letting the dogs chase our trucks, or trying to land a plane without breaking it... but it is something that we've done on a regular basis, so we've had a more consistent father-son activity lately. It's a new normal that I really enjoy and it's definitely been a blessing.

What about you? Do you have a Coronavirus blessing story? Would you be willing to share it? I'd love to publish some Coronavirus blessings in a future issue of the newsletter. In the meantime, just keep in mind that as that New Jerusalem descends, things are going to change. We might as well start to enjoy it.

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## **The Influence of the Ancient Church on Modern Religion**

Before I moved to Australia, I was rather daunted by the prospect of having to give doctrinal classes twice a month, so I pulled together some resources before moving. I decided to even call a retired minister, Rev Prescott Rogers, to ask him what was his best material, and where could I get a copy of it.

Well, I can't believe it's taken this long to get to it, but for the last few months we've been working through his material that he produced in 1990. I've done a fair bit of editing, subtracting some things adding others, and I'm willing to admit that I'm pretty happy with the result. So far we've had an overview class about ancient culture in general, looking at what the Writings say about the fallen Ancient Church and what manifested out of that, as well noticing how the spread of ancient language supports what the Writings say about the spread of the church, and then seeing the impact of the fallen church in Mesopotamia, Egypt and India.

Some of the highlights for me have been exploring the flood story out of Sumer that is found in the Epic of Gilgamesh. It's not just that it's a flood story, but that it's a righteous character called by God to build a boat covered with pitch that is to contain every species of animal in order to save them from the impending doom. Once the storm stops, both stories tell that the hero releases doves to test and see if things are getting back to normal

(spoiler alert! Life was never the same again). The boat/ark rested on a mountain in the end, and then the hero got out and offered a sacrifice to God.

There were two classes on Egypt, and thanks to Rev Julian Duckworth we looked at how many early hieroglyphics were written based off a spiritual meaning, as well as a look at a Pharaoh who instituted monotheism in Egypt. Plus we learned that one of the pyramids has eight sides! Bet you didn't know that! But it's true. You can look it up.

Most recently we looked at India, and I was surprised to learn the similarity between Greek and Hindu deities. For example, the Hindu god Indra sure seems like a knock off of Zeus. They are both omnipotent, thunderbolt throwing, shape shifting deities that enlisted the help of their mothers to overthrow their fathers. Despite all their power, they both went to great lengths to seduce a woman who was off limits.

We've still got China, Japan, Greece, Rome, the Americas and some on Australia yet to do! I've managed to record some of previous classes, and you can find them on our website ([www.hurstvilleneewchurch.com/biblestudy.html](http://www.hurstvilleneewchurch.com/biblestudy.html)) under the "Media" tab, then click "Bible Study." For the future classes you're welcome to join us on Zoom. Here's the link, but I have also posted it on the "Bible Study" page so you can just click on it to get in. <https://zoom.us/j/8163754711?pwd=Q3YvZ3BWQ2ZKYUIOZTduRGJld0pRZz09> The password is "Baringa".

To me all of this is not only intellectually interesting, but I find it compelling evidence of the veracity of what was revealed to Swedenborg. I don't know about you, but personally since so few actually take Swedenborg seriously, I find it nice to get some confirmation in historical record that what we're being told really IS true. If you find this stuff interesting, I hope you can join in!

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## Pulpit Swap

It's been a while since we did a pulpit swap... I think it was Palm Sunday a year ago was our last one, so we're overdue. Howard and I decided **September 20<sup>th</sup>** would be a date that would work for us both. So if you'd like to hear somebody else preach for a change, this is your chance! I do intend for the service to be live streamed, so all of our online viewers will get to see and hear Howard as well.

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## Spring Women's Weekend

Ladies, you are invited to participate in our low-scale and/or virtual women's weekend gathering next month, **October 16-18**. While details have yet to be hammered out, we hope to have small, regional get-togethers as well as Zoom-facilitated online interactions. Please let Jenn know if you'd like to join in on the fun! ([jenn@beiswenger.net](mailto:jenn@beiswenger.net))

## **Adventures in Evangelization**

A couple of months ago I wrote an article titled “Adventures in Evangelization” for New Church Life (you’ll see it in the next issue, and also in the next issue of *The New Age*) that goes through the development of my YouTube channel. While the channel has seen sustained growth, I mention in the article that I also get a fair share of comments that could nicely be classified as “unkind.” These days the good outnumber the bad, but recently I got this via email... and just for context, she was writing regarding my video that states that Eve is a symbol for the ego:

I am just curious of a quick explanation of your understanding for a difference between Eve and the serpent. I've (since coming to see deeper meaning) thought of the serpent as ego. After coming across your videos on YouTube, I see how Eve can be the ego. Maybe Satan is the lie we want to believe because it looks like truth to our ego. Adam, who has the Spirit of God within him, doesn't directly look for the lie he just believes it because his ego "feeds" it to him. ????

Don't want to take up your time, but thought an email was easier than a YouTube comment. I really appreciate your videos. I look for any source that delves into allegory or metaphor. Over the last 7 years they have really started popping up. It has been very enlightening and freeing for us from our fundamental Baptist upbringing. I know you take a lot of heat from comments, but there is so much good for those that can see and hear. They don't all make a comment, just always know there are many of us out there appreciating your hard work.

Thanks, Deana

I replied of course, and to answer her question I basically cut and paste a couple of small sections from the Writings where Swedenborg gives examples from Scripture to “prove” the symbolism. The main point I try to make with people is that in order for Biblical symbolism to work, the symbolism has to be consistent throughout Scripture. So whatever a serpent means in Genesis, that meaning has to hold up elsewhere too. She replies:

Thanks so much! That really helps! I love finding new sources. I had not heard of Swedenborg before. I definitely will do some reading of his writings. I think when the time is right people have their eyes opened. Sure is how it happened for us. I wasn't looking for what I found. It just made total sense. We have family and friends who totally can't see it and a few who were just as amazed at how obvious it all is once you see. Definitely cannot go back to our old way of thinking. Impossible! It might have helped us that we were not in "church" for many years, so had no daily loyalties to an ideology. I find in the family the ones who cannot see are at church every Sun AM & PM and Wed night. I think they cannot let go of the security they have found in their "group". For us we were never secure in church. We always had the part of the outsider, which we are now grateful for.

I share this with you because I think it is useful for you to see that there really are people out there who get it. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like Elijah, complaining to the Lord saying, "Nobody is listening Lord! They all worship Baal!" Deanna lives in Texas, so we won't be seeing her at church, which can make us feel like we're not actually accomplishing any growth. But the Lord informs him that in fact there were 7,000 who had never bowed to Baal, even if Elijah didn't know about them. Likewise there are people we are reaching even if we don't know about it.

What I find particularly interesting is that she admits she wasn't a church goer, and that is what has enabled her to see the truth. The Writings tell us that this will be the case in the future, and that for the church to grow, it's going to have to die first. Accounts like these are just another way in which we verify the truth of the Writings. So take heart because there really are plenty of people who are interested in the deeper meaning of the Word.

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## Carrying Baggage?

I came across this story recently, and thought it worth sharing.

Long ago, two monks were walking through the forest one morning when they came across a distressed young woman. Tearfully, she asked them for help crossing the river, which had swollen from recent rains, so she could get home safely.

Although they had both taken strict vows to not communicate with the outside world, the first monk happily agreed, carrying the young woman across on his back. She thanked him and left, and the two monks continued their journey for many hours in silence.

Finally, when night fell, they set up camp. But before they went to sleep, the second monk could not contain his emotions any more.

"How could you!" he burst out.

"We have taken strict vows of chastity! We vowed to never communicate with outsiders! But you carried that woman on your back!" he railed against his friend.

The first monk looked at his red face and simply said: "My friend, I carried her for only a few minutes. You, however, have carried her all day!"

It makes you think - how long are you prepared to 'carry' your past?

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## Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Owen Heldon** (6<sup>th</sup>), **Carolyn Heldon** (8<sup>th</sup>), **Klaire Horner** (9<sup>th</sup>), **Liam Johnson** (10<sup>th</sup>), **Sylvia Hicks** (13<sup>th</sup>), **Karen Evans** (13<sup>th</sup>), **Jeffrey Heldon** (15<sup>th</sup>), **Phillipa Horner** (15<sup>th</sup>), **Azalea Robson** (19<sup>th</sup>), **Phillip Walsh** (29<sup>th</sup>), **Lily Heldon** (29<sup>th</sup> August)

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