

A Sphere of Peace in the Midst of Turmoil

A sermon for the Holy Supper by the Rev. Michael Gladish
Mitchellville, MD, March 1st, 2015

There are several notable stories in the Word highlighting the sense of peace that certain people experienced in the midst of tremendous turmoil or upheaval. We focused on one of these in our lesson for the children today (Elijah and the still, small voice – 1st Kings 19). Another from 2nd Kings reveals the prophet, Elisha, and his servant pursued and finally surrounded by a Syrian army with horses and chariots ready to carry them away. The servant looked out, terrified, and said, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” But Elisha answered, “Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them,” and when his eyes were opened they both saw horses and chariots of fire all around them (2 Kings 6).

Still another well known incident is in the New Testament (Matthew 14, Mark 6 & John 6), where the Lord appeared to His disciples calmly walking on the water in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. This is not to be confused with an earlier incident in Matthew where we find the Lord asleep IN the boat when another storm came up and frightened them all to death. In that case, as in the other, He asked why they doubted, and then we read, He simply “arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm” (Matt. 8:26).

We also have at least two other stories in the Gospels in which the Lord Himself is threatened by angry crowds outraged by His teaching, and He simply “passes through the midst of them” unharmed, walking away (Luke 4:30 & John 8:59).

No doubt you can think of many more scenes like this in the letter of the Word. Some may involve military sieges, some plagues or desolations, and some – like the turmoil in Jerusalem leading up to the crucifixion – political strife. The point is that in every case there is a calm in the eye of the storm, a power that transcends the chaos, a sphere of peace that prevails in spite of all the threats and confusion in the stories. For example, consider the night of the Last Supper, a time of solemn prayer and reflection just before the Lord’s betrayal and arrest. Consider again how the Lord appeared to the two disciples as they walked, dejected after the crucifixion, toward Emmaus, and how the Lord appeared to them, calmly instructing them and finally enlightening them when He broke bread for them in the village.

So it is in our lives. The Lord in John said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). And again, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer [that is, have confidence!], I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Whether we are suffering natural, psychological or spiritual pain the Lord has given us all the means to overcome these things, that is, to rise above them even if only inwardly, even if only for brief periods of time. These states of peace remind us of and reconfirm us in the awareness of a deeper level of life that qualifies everything about us, even so that we can have a kind of happiness that is not at all obvious outwardly, even perhaps to ourselves. This is important! We know that if we take other people’s lives at face value we may very well be deceived. But what about our own lives? Surely the Lord sees things we can’t see in ourselves, and there are actual teachings, *like this one*, that indicate much better things than we might assume. We read,

“...[T]he more nearly anyone is conjoined to the Lord the happier he becomes. This happiness, however, *is rarely manifest in the world*; for a person is then in a natural state, and the natural does not communicate with the spiritual by continuity but by correspondences; and this communication is felt only by a certain quiet and peace of mind that especially follows combats against evils. But when a person puts off the natural state and enters the spiritual state, which takes place after his departure from the world, then the happiness described above gradually manifests itself” (DP 41, see also NJHD 236).

It is similar with heavenly *peace*, although this teaching makes it clear that we *can* have a perception of it in the world, provided we raise our minds above the sphere of the world. We read,

“As a person is unable, as long as he is in the body, to receive the peace of heaven, so he can have no perception of it, because his perception is in what is natural. To perceive it he must be able, as to thought, to be raised up and withdrawn from the body and kept in the spirit, and at the same time be with angels” (HH 284).

All this can be illustrated by the further teaching in *Heaven and Hell* that “all *delights* flow forth from love, for what a person loves he feels to be delightful...” (HH 396). But if those loves are attacked, threatened or in any way compromised a person might appear to be truly miserable. Indeed he might BE miserable outwardly: - poor, mournful, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or in prison; and yet because what he really loves is good he HAS the delight of heaven at heart, and this will be fully revealed and nourished in the life after death.

How, then, can we be sure we have this good love and are in fact conjoined with the Lord? It is the same as if we were to ask, “How can we have true faith and charity?” a question that the Lord answers very plainly, saying, “Shun evils as sins, and approach the Lord, and you will have as much as you desire” (Faith 12). The first of charity is to shun evils as sins against the Lord, and the second is to do what is good according to His Word. This may not create an appearance of perfect happiness in this world, where it is a struggle, always, to do these things, but if the effort is sincere *there is a peacefulness within* that belies the appearance – even to ourselves. This is why, when we are with those whose loves are similar to our own, and when we can share our deeper feelings freely, we are happiest and feel the greatest peace outwardly.

Still, we should never forget that even when we are in states of temptation, in fact *especially* when we are in states of temptation, the Lord is present with us providing for our freedom (otherwise we would give in without a fight – AC 1947). And since the Lord’s love wants nothing so much as our *eternal happiness* (TCR 43) it goes without saying that this happiness is available to us no matter what we may have to endure.

Consider the teaching in the *Arcana* #8478:

“...[T]hose who trust in the Divine, notwithstanding they have care for the morrow, still have it not, because they do not think of the morrow with solicitude, still less with anxiety. Unruffled is their spirit whether they obtain the objects of their desire, or not; and they do not grieve over the loss of them, being content with their lot. If they become rich, they do not set their hearts on riches; if they are raised to honors, they do not regard themselves as more worthy than others; if

they become poor, they are not made sad; if their circumstances are mean, they are not dejected. They know that for those who trust in the Divine all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and that whatever befalls them in time is still conducive thereto.

Indeed, “they who are in the stream of Providence are all the time carried along toward everything that is happy, whatever may be the appearance of the means; and that those are in the stream of Providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him.... Be it known also that *insofar as anyone is in the stream of Providence, so far he is in a state of peace*; also that insofar as anyone is in a state of peace from the good of faith, so far he is in the Divine Providence.”

The truth is that all temptations really are conflicts between the angels and the evil spirits who are with us (AC 741). So we read, “There are evil spirits who at that time activate a person’s falsities and evils.... Indeed they draw out of his memory [all the wrong things] he has thought and carried out since early childhood. Evil spirits can do this so cleverly and wickedly as to defy description. *But the angels who are with him draw out his goods and truths, and in this way defend him.* This conflict is what the person feels and perceives in himself and is what causes the sting and torment of conscience” (AC 751). “...[I]t should also be known that angels continually protect a person and avert the evils which evil spirits endeavor to do to him” (AC 761).

What all this means is that if, when we are in states of temptation, we can find ways to align ourselves with the angels, *and see our struggles from their point of view*, we can take advantage of their influence to make sure we are not overwhelmed. It’s a lot like the situation in 2nd Kings, where Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes would be opened to see the horses and chariots of fire and that “those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” These horses and chariots correspond to the affection for understanding and the machinery of thought, all of which are on fire with the love of what is good and true. In a sense they are the angels of our better selves, the faith and charity that we all have from the Lord, however hidden they may be in states of worldly distraction or distress. Remember, the horses and chariots and the men of the Syrian army were all struck with blindness and kept from doing any harm. Indeed, Elisha commanded that rather than being slaughtered they be provided with a great feast. So it is that even the critical, skeptical, analytical parts of our mind are preserved by the angels (AC 761) and can be nourished by the truths of the Word if we will take them there.

Thus the teaching is given to the New Church in *at least 5* different places that if we would just believe, *as is the case*, that all good and truth come from the Lord and that all evil and falsity come from hell, we would not take credit for the good OR condemn ourselves for the evil (AC 6206, HH 302, NJHD 277, DP 320, etc.), but we would understand that we have a choice. And that choice, today and every day, is whether we will allow ourselves to be paralyzed by the apparent strength of the chaotic forces around us, or whether we will seek and find that peaceful place more deeply within our minds where the Lord Himself is present calming the storm, patiently expounding to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27), and finally breaking bread for us so that we can be reminded of His love, and have the confidence we need to get on with our lives.

Amen.