

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 30 August 2020**

Children's Talk: A Strong, Hardworking Heart of Flesh

- We're going to talk some more today about marriage and relationships.
- And before you go, "Ugh... not more lovey-dovey, smoochy-smoochy stuff..." don't worry: I'm not talking about romantic love I'm talking about love in any relationship.
 - Love for your parents, your brothers or sisters, your friends, *etc.*
 - It also does relate to the kind of love that you'll have for your husband or wife someday but we're not going to focus on that much.
- When you think about love, what symbol comes to mind?
 - Probably a heart shape, right?
 - That can mean romantic love, like on a valentine card or love note, but it also can just mean that you love somebody.
 - You might enjoy sending lots of heart emojis to your grandma or something—the purple one, the green one, five red ones....
- The Lord talks about 2 different kinds of hearts that we can have.
- This is part of the Lord's message to the people, through the prophet Ezekiel:
 - Ezekiel 36:26-29 (NKJV)
 - 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.
- The Lord says that He's going to give each person a *new* heart.
 - Why?
 - Because they have a heart of stone.
 - And the Lord promises to take the heart of stone out and give each person a heart of flesh.
- Here I've got a stone; can you see what would be some of the problems with having a heart of stone inside your chest?
 - You would die very quickly, right?
 - Symbolically, do you think a heart of stone would be very loving?
 - In the Bible people are called hard of heart when they're not loving and not willing to care about other people.
 - For example, it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the Children of Israel go free from slavery.
 - We all have times when our hearts feel hard—when we don't feel like being loving.
- Here I've got a stuffed animal teddy.
 - You can see how this is much softer and gentler and looks much more loving.
 - People talk about times when their heart softens and they can be loving again.
 - I think that's the kind of thing that the Lord is talking about when He says that He'll give us a heart of flesh.

- But it's interesting that He doesn't say that He'll give us a soft heart but a heart of flesh.
 - I think there's a reason for that.
 - You might know that your heart is about the size of your fist and has the very important job of pumping blood all around your body which helps keep your whole body alive.
 - To do that it has to have a lot of strong muscles that are working, pretty much all the time.
 - Squeeze your hand a couple of times like you were trying to squeeze something and that will give you a feel for what your heart is doing all the time—squeeze, squeeze, squeeze, squeeze.
 - And if you want to get a feel for what your heart might feel like, feel the muscles in your thumb.
- I think it's useful to think about a heart of flesh being a heart of muscle.
 - Muscle is not as hard as stone.
 - But it's also not as soft as a stuffed animal.
 - And muscle is strong.
 - Good love from the Lord is not rock-hard but it's also not squishy—it's strong.
 - Like a good strong hug from someone you love.
 - That's the kind of heart the Lord wants to give us—hard-working, strong, compassionate love.
- How do we get that?
 - By trying to keep the Lord's commandments.
 - Stony hearts are willing to hurt other people—to lie, steal, cause pain with our words or our fists—hearts of flesh don't do that.
- Sometimes I don't feel like being loving at all.
 - I find that it's useful to notice that—to say to myself, "I have a stony heart right now."
 - And then to ask the Lord to give me a heart of flesh instead.
 - I don't have to try to make the heart of stone love someone or be kind.
 - I can ask the Lord to give me a different way of responding.
- If you can do that work to notice when you have a heart of stone and ask the Lord to give you a heart of flesh instead, it will improve pretty much every relationship in your life.
 - It will help you be more loving to your parents, your brother or sister, your friends, and eventually your husband or your wife.
- *Amen.*

Soulmates? Therefore... what?

Part 1: Before You Get Married

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
30 August 2020

Intro

- We're going to be talking today and in two weeks' time about soulmates.
- When I was a teenager we called soulmates "C.P.s".
 - People talked about trying to "find your C.P."
 - C.P. was short for "Conjugal Partner".
 - Technically "conjugal partner" just means "married partner" but people used it to mean your true eternal conjugal partner, or what would more commonly be called your soulmate.
- When I was in my last year of high school I wrote a song called "Song for My C.P." and performed it at a kind of variety show.
- So my high school self clearly believed in soulmates; do you?
 - Do you believe that there's one perfect match for you out there in the universe or possibly sitting next to you on the couch or in the pew as you watch this?
- Here's a passage about soulmates from the book *Married Love* in the teachings of the New Church.
- A wise angel says the following:
 - *Married Love* §316:3 (cf. §229)
 - "The Lord's Divine providence is most specific and therefore most universal in connection with marriages and in its operation in marriages in heaven.... It is... provided by the Lord that conjugal pairs be born, and they are raised and continually prepared for their marriages, neither the boy nor the girl being aware of the fact. Then, after a period of time, the girl—now a marriageable young woman—and the boy—now a young man able to marry—meet somewhere, as though by fate, and notice each other. And they immediately recognize, as if by a kind of instinct, that they are a match, thinking to themselves from a kind of inner dictate, the young man, 'she is mine,' and the young woman, 'he is mine.' Later, after this thought has for some time become settled in the minds of each, they deliberately talk about it together and pledge themselves to each other in marriage.
 - "We say as though by fate and as if by instinct, when we mean by Divine providence, because when one is unaware that it is Divine providence, that is how it appears."
- It's a beautiful picture of two people who are a perfect match being brought together by the Lord's providence.
 - And I think it's a picture of what the Lord would like to do for all of us.
- But I don't think that many people should expect to have this kind of experience on earth.
- Why?
 - Because this angel is specifically talking about marriages in heaven—that is, how two people who died as infants and were raised in heaven can be led by the Lord to find each other.

- And also because other passages from the same book, *Married Loved*, explicitly say that it is hard to find your soulmate on earth.
- For example:
 - *Married Love* §49
 - [U]nions formed on earth are seldom formed on the basis of any internal perception of love, but as the result of an external perception which conceals the internal one.

Furthermore, marriages are also contracted in the area, city or town of one's birth or residence, where the only choice possible is confined and limited to the households one knows, and there only with people of a station matching one's own. As a result, marriages entered into in the world are for the most part external marriages, and not at the same time internal, even though it is the internal union or union of souls that makes a real marriage. And that internal union is not discernible until a person has put off his external character and taken on his internal character, which happens after death.
- There you have it, folks, a beautiful heavenly reality described and then a somewhat depressing comment on the reality of things in this world.
 - And these kinds of passages are what inspired me to want to do these sermons on soulmates.
 - It feels really important to me to show you that, in the teachings of the New Church, the Lord provides both a beautiful picture of ideals *and* a very realistic picture of how relationships go.
 - We need both.
 - I sometimes hear the criticism that the New Church talks too much about the ideal and not enough about the messy reality of life.
 - And that makes me frustrated because the book *Married Love* talks a lot about the messy reality of life and even has very practical useful advice for how to deal with it.
 - I want people to know that and feel the Lord's understanding and mercy in His teachings.
 - And at the same time I also want to help people be able to see that it is still possible and worthwhile and life-changing to continue to pursue ideals, even in the context of a messy relationship between two wildly imperfect people.
- Anyway, that's the balance that I'm going to be attempting to achieve in these two sermons.
 - Not being out of touch with reality and not losing sight of the ideal.
 - This topic would probably have been better as a dialogue but what we've got is me monologuing.
 - Please send me the thoughts or questions you have in response and let's turn it into a conversation.
 - And I'm probably going to get this balance wrong sometimes, so please tell me if you think I do and re-read the passages and come to your own conclusions about their significance.

You Will Be Married to Your Soulmate In Heaven

- Just to finish off the question about whether soulmates are a thing, the teachings of the New Church would answer that question with a resounding yes.
- If you get to heaven, you will be married to your soulmate.
 - If you were lucky enough to meet them on earth you will continue to be married to that person to eternity.
 - And if you didn't get married on earth or were married to someone who wasn't your soulmate, you will separate from that person and be given an eternal partner to be married to.
 - *Married Love* §50
 - [I]n the case of people who after preparation are introduced into heaven, marriage is provided with a partner whose soul inclines to union with the soul of the other, to the point that they do not wish to lead two lives but one. That is why, after separation, a man is given a suitable wife, and a woman, likewise, a suitable husband.
- I think that's a useful thing to know, regardless of what your relationship status is—single, dating, happily married, unhappily married, divorced, widowed—it's good to know that in heaven you will be married to your soulmate.
- But the thing I'm more interested in than whether or not you believe in the idea of soulmates is what conclusions you come to based on your belief about that.
 - The clunky title of this sermon series is "Soulmates? Therefore... what?"
 - Today, we're going to focus on the implications of our beliefs about soulmates before you get married.
 - And in two weeks' time we're going to talk about the implications of our beliefs about soulmates *after* you get married.

Can You Tell If Someone is Your Soulmate?

- The question for the before you get married phase of life is how do you find your soulmate, right?
 - Well, maybe?
- A question that you have to answer before that is can you even tell if a particular person is your soulmate?
 - Here, you've probably heard stories from different people about how they knew right away, or that it took a long time for them to know, or that they've never been 100% sure.
- I don't know what your experience has been or will be but I would caution against waiting for full certainty to choose to marry someone.
 - You are likely to always have some doubts.
 - There are stories in the Bible of people being given a clear sign to indicate God's desire for them to do something—including stories where God gives a sign that a particular person is the right person to marry.
- But I don't think we should ask for a sign or wait for a sign from God.
 - The teachings about how the Lord's Divine Providence works apply here.
 - *Divine Providence* §175
 - It is a law of the Divine Providence that a person should not perceive and feel anything of the operation of the Divine Providence, but still that he should know and acknowledge it.

- *Divine Providence* §154
 - It is a law of the Divine Providence that a person should be led and taught by the Lord from heaven by means of the Word, and doctrine and preaching from the Word, and this to all appearance as of himself.

- *Divine Providence* §179
 - Since a foreknowledge of future events takes away fundamental humanity, which is to act in freedom in accordance with one's reason, therefore it is granted to no one to know the future. But it is permitted everyone to employ their reason to form conclusions about things to come. Reason with all its constituents is then engaged in its life. It is because of this that a person does not know their lot after death, or know any outcome until they arrive at it. For if they were to know, they would no longer consider in their inner self how they should act or live in order to arrive at it, but would think only in their outer self that they were approaching it...

- We are meant to be led and taught by the Lord—including in this very important area of our lives—but the Lord is not going to show us the future or allow us to see how or where He is leading and guiding us because that would remove our freedom and agency.
 - We are meant to be considering how we “should act or live in order to arrive at...” marriage to our soulmate so let's talk about how we do that, starting with what to look for in a partner.

What Should You Be Looking For in a Partner?

The Ideal

- Here is another place where we will be trying to hold onto both ideal and reality.
- The ideal is to find a person to marry who shares the same deep beliefs, values, ideals, and worldview as you.
 - Not just someone who you find attractive or pays attention to you or likes the same movies as you.
 - Those things aren't bad but they aren't exactly something to base a marriage on.
 - In getting to know someone we want to take the time to talk to them about things that matter—their beliefs, their thoughts about current events, the principles or causes that they care most about.
- There is a lot in the book *Married Love* about how marriage is intended to be something that joins a husband and wife together at all levels.
 - I'd recommend particularly reading the section on betrothal (§§295ff) and the section on causes of cold in marriage (§§238ff).
 - The internal causes of cold in marriage all have to do with the two people having religious differences.
- So the ideal is to try to find someone who shares your religious belief and values.

The Difficulties of Reality

- Now let's talk about the realities of trying to find someone.
- It can be really, really hard, not to mention being emotionally exhausting.
- We already read that passage about the physical limits of this natural world in which you only have contact with so many people.

- And this is particularly difficult if you're trying to find someone who is a good match with you at a deeper level.
 - It's a lot easier to find people who are clear "Nope!"s than people who might have some potential.
 - And it's hard because you can't really see those internal qualities of a person.
 - One passage says that "Internal qualities come out only after a period of marriage, and are known only as they inject themselves into external ones" (*Married Love* §320:3).
 - So you need to look for something that you mostly won't be able to see before getting married.
- Another thing that makes this really challenging is that, over time, our beliefs and values will change and develop and we may grow apart from our partner rather than closer together, as Joel talked about last week.
 - You can't know how a person's beliefs and values may change with time but maybe what we can take away from this, is that, if someone's beliefs and values already significantly clash with our own before we've gotten married, then that's a pretty important red flag to pay attention to.
- There is also another strand of teachings that is worth considering: the teachings about second marriage.
- There's a whole chapter on it in the book *Married Love*.
 - While we're on the topic, it's worth saying that it is entirely allowed for someone to get married again after their spouse has died.
 - Passages say that getting married a second time is not necessarily an indication that the person did not deeply love the person they had been married to before.
 - And then there's a passage that lists a variety of reasons why people might want to get remarried.
 - I'll read a few that it mentions; it also mentions more than this and says that there even more reasons on top of these.
 - *Married Love* §319
 - If there are little children in the house and a new mother must be found for them.
If there is an earnest desire for still more children.
 - If there is need for joint assistance and shared duties, as is the case in a variety of businesses and trades.
 - It depends, moreover, on the nature of the partner who is left, whether after the first marriage he or she can or cannot live alone or without a mate.
- My question—which really is a question—is do these reasons also apply for people who are looking to get married for the first time?
 - Is "an earnest desire" to have children a valid reason to get married?
 - How about really wanting someone to work with you on your job?
 - How about simply not wanting to live alone?
- Ultimately, of course, it's going to be your call whether to choose to marry a particular person.
 - You will have to way up for yourself whether they seem to be a good fit with you as to religious beliefs and values.

- For a whole variety of reasons, you may decide to go with the person in front of you who seems to be a good enough fit that you can build a good marriage together.
- Or you may decide that it's better to hold out for someone who might be a better fit for you, even though that might mean remaining single for your whole earthly life.
- Or you might never meet someone who you get serious enough with to even be able to consider whether you would want to marry them.
- But, that doesn't mean that you can't work on your marriage to your soulmate.
 - Because, even more important than our work to *find* the right person to marry is our work to *become* a person who could have a loving, heavenly marriage.

What to Work On

- I think this is really the most important point to understand about soulmates in the state before getting married.
- I sent an early draft of an outline of this sermon to an email list for New Church ministers and a bunch of them responded with some version of the same message.
- For example, one minister wrote,
 - "Until we are regenerating no one can be our soulmate. Everyone is wrong for us. Unfortunately people generally marry fairly early in life, so they are unlikely either to find a regenerate person or to be one themselves. This is why conjugal partners aren't found but made."
- Another one got more specific about what that work looks like: he wrote,
 - "We are naive and foolish to think we can find the one-in-a-billion possible partners among our contemporaries on earth. But we can shun evils, and commit without reserve to following the Lord's laws of marriage. As I'm fond of saying, the best way to be led by the Lord to your eternal partner is to follow the Lord! Only He has the omniscience, foresight and providence to make it all happen."
 - He then compared it to Joshua, on the edge of the promised land—a land flowing with milk and honey but also a land with a lot of scary enemies to be dealt with.
 - And he pointed out that there was no way that Joshua and the Children of Israel were going to be able to conquer the land on their own.
 - But Joshua was still told to have courage to follow the Lord's laws.
 - The Lord said to him,
 - Joshua 1:7 (NKJV)
 - "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go."
- And another minister talked about how soulmates aren't so much *born* for each other as they are *re-born* for each other.
 - This connects with scripture from the Gospel of John where the Lord says that unless we are born again we cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5,7) and where it says that people who receive the Lord become children of God who are born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13).
 - Marriage to our soulmate is a heavenly kind of marriage and what's required to enter into heaven in general also apply for having a heavenly marriage.

- The work that we need to do to be prepared for a heavenly marriage is exactly the same work that we need to do to be prepared for heaven in general.
 - So we can be working on that regardless of our marital status and there are doubtless many single people who are much farther along in that process than many of their married counterparts.
- It's a strange system, on the face of it.
 - Most people get married when they're young, not particularly self-aware, and pretty self-centred.
 - And somehow the plan is to take those two flawed individuals and build something heavenly with them.
 - Or build something heavenly with what they each could become.
 - It reminds me of an interview I read with the head of a company that was working on developing some groundbreaking technology and the way that they had to think was trying to figure out how they could make this technology work if they had computers that were faster and smaller than any that existed when they began the project.
 - But they trusted that by the time they had completed the other development work, those faster and smaller computers would have been developed; and they were right.

Conclusion

- The Lord can work miracles if we do our best to follow Him.
 - We read some of a passage earlier that says that the majority of marriage on earth are for external reasons but it ends by saying that marriages that are an internal union of souls can sometimes be provided by the Lord on earth,
 - *Married Love* §49
 - ...in the case of people who from their youth had loved, desired and sought from the Lord a lawful and lovely partnership with one, and who spurn and reject roving lusts as an offense to the nostrils.
- I found that to be a really helpful passage to hold onto before getting married.
 - I could keep asking the Lord to give me the real deal and I could focus on trying to not act on selfish lust.
 - The teachings of the New Church say that, when we do that work, we open ourselves up to the Lord flowing in with heavenly love and to Him leading us in a good direction in His Providence.
 - And that heavenly love is what will connect us with our soulmate, whether we manage to find them on earth or only after death.
- On paper, marriage between two flawed, self-centred human beings doesn't seem like it could possibly work out well and it seems like there would be no chance of us finding our soulmate in this natural world.
 - And neither of those things would be possible if it were just up to us.
 - But, fortunately for us, it's not up to us.
- Or, to use the Lord's own words:
 - Mark 10:27 (NKJV)
 - "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."
- *Amen.*